TEACHING SABBATH

VIA PASTORAL MOUNTAIN COHORT

A THESIS-PROJECT

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF

GORDON-CONWELL THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE

DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY

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MAY 2023

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my faithful and diligent mentor, Dr. Phil Thorne, for providing guidance and support throughout the entire D.Min process. Thank you to Dr. David Currie for his teaching and leadership in each residency. I am sincerely grateful to Grace Covenant Church for supporting, encouraging, and praying for me throughout my continuing education. I want to thank my daughters, Mary, Evangeline, Rhiannon, and Blake for being little inspirations for as well as heaven-sent diversions from writing. Finally, and most importantly, thank you to my gracious and loving wife, Kate, for being my cheerleader and biggest supporter on this journey. I could not have done any of this without you.

ABSTRACT

This thesis-project explores the necessity of teaching pastors to practice a weekly Sabbath and provides a method for doing so through a wilderness retreat. First, the author gathered data on pastors and their experience with the Sabbath. Then, consideration was given to the biblical and theological foundations of the Sabbath to demonstrate the necessity for practicing it. Next, the author reflected on literature from six different perspectives on the Sabbath. Then, integrating all of this research, the author developed a project to teach a small group of pastors both the importance of the Sabbath and how to practice it personally. Finally, the project itself was reviewed and areas for further study were considered.

CHAPTER ONE

THE NEED FOR SABBATH AMONG PASTORS

My Experience with Sabbath

My first year of doctoral coursework at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary covered the topic of the person of the pastor. This involved reading, discussing, and spending time considering the importance of a healthy pastoral life before focusing on what a pastor does. During this reflection, one area that stood out as needing particular attention in my own life was the biblical command for a Sabbath. Up to that point in my ministry career, I had typically taken Mondays as a "day off." However, of the five hundred or so weekly opportunities to Sabbath during those years, I fear I took a complete Sabbath at a rate of only 10% or less.

The desire to be efficient, to be known as a hard worker, to make the rest of the week easier, or to simply get things done, even to glorify God, often caused me to open my laptop and work a half day or more most Mondays. Furthermore, the few days I got away from work were often spent on inconsequential or even unhealthy things that left me more distracted than attuned to my own heart, mind, body, and soul. This was not just a once-a-week habit, either. Work often crept into my evenings, with the glow of my laptop bathing my face at night in bed or demanding my attention when I could have been spending time with my wife, daughters or the Lord.

This habitual work style led me to be a very productive pastor, but at the cost of my mental, physical, familial, and spiritual health. As I looked back on that first career decade, I found myself needing to repent of habits I had developed in the name of ministry and to seek a more balanced life. So, I began to explore the issue of my personal practice of Sabbath and how to choose to rest.

I began a six-month process of committing to one day of rest, away from work and, in my case, away from the technological distractions of my cell phone and laptop. I chose to rest and practice a Sabbath every Sunday evening from roughly 5pm, when my Sunday "church day" ended, through Monday evening. Other than committing to take the Sabbath and to come to the end of the day feeling rested and refreshed, I had few other measurable goals.

I recognized that for a day of Sabbath to be beneficial, some structure would prove necessary. But rather than scheduling every minute of Sabbath time to read, pray, or recreate, I tried to be intentionally unintentional. In my reading about healthy Sabbath observance by others, the time of rest with God was often sanctified by practicing God's presence not only during times of prayer, reflection, or Bible reading, but throughout the day. Therefore, I made sure that my day was free—free to pursue time outdoors or in a coffee shop, to read or not to read, to stop or to go. The primary focus during my six-month Sabbath journey was to refrain from work, to grow a habit of rest, and to grow closer to God and those closest to me. Throughout the process I journaled to keep track of my thoughts and feelings.

To say that the result of my experience of Sabbath was life-changing may sound melodramatic, but it is true. My marriage became healthier; my relationship with my children was stronger; my work didn't feel as crushing, and I felt more satisfied with my life, ministry, and faith. As I set aside one day a week for no other purpose than to rest, I found that my life began to feel different. The time I spent at work the other six days felt different. My time with my family felt different. And my relationship with God changed and reached a deeper level of trust and intimacy.

The day my six-month experiment ended, I knew I would continue to practice a Sabbath. That was March of 2020, the same month the world changed on a global scale due to the

COVID-19 pandemic. People were forced to stay and work from home. Church went online via streaming. Email communication increased significantly and phone calls and Zoom meetings became the norm. The boundaries between work and home disappeared.

Had I not learned how to stop and rest I believe that my pace of work in 2020 would have become untenable. I don't know if I would have chosen to leave ministry, as many of my peers and co-ministers of the Gospel chose to do in the past two years, but I know that I would have experienced much greater levels of dissatisfaction. Perhaps more tragically, if I had not learned to step away one day each week, too much of my identity would have been tied up in my work and the loss of that identity would have caused great personal distress to me and my family.

Until I learned about the principle of Sabbath in a D.Min. cohort, I thought the practice was reserved for ultra-religious orthodox Jews and Seventh-Day Adventists. It seemed to run counter to the culture of the Protestant Ethic in which I had been inculcated and to which, frankly, I am well-adjusted and well-suited. I thought Jesus trampled over the fourth commandment and so I followed suit. But through my recent study and experience of Sabbath, I have found the opposite to be true. With greater clarity, I now see that Sabbath rest is a principle that the healthiest, most well-respected, and long-tenured pastors practice as a cornerstone of effective ministry.[1] Rather than discovering something new, it seems like a veil has been lifted and I am now seeing something of great importance I had simply been ignoring.

Defining Sabbath

The term Sabbath comes from the Hebrew word *shabbat* which means, simply, "to stop" or "to rest". The biblical basis of and command for Sabbath will be discussed extensively in the following chapter. However, as a cursory overview, the Sabbath for Jews was a specific day of

[1] Bob Russell, *After 50 Years of Ministry* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2016), 132.

the week during which the community was to refrain from work to rest and remember. A seven-day calendar or work week has no natural explanation and, in fact, at different points in history, both five- and ten-day weeks have been suggested (often to disastrous effect).[2] But for the Christian, a seven-day week is rooted in the creation story of Genesis, in which God created the world in six days and rested on the seventh.

The command to observe a Sabbath comes later in the biblical narrative when, after rescuing his people from slavery in Egypt, God takes them on a journey through the desert and gives them ten commandments at Sinai. While the Sabbath of Genesis precedes the giving of the Law, "The seven-day week is enshrined in the fourth command: keep the Sabbath day holy."[3] The command to remember a Sabbath day and keep it holy ties directly back to what it signifies, liberation from slavery. Sabbath is then referenced in Mosaic law on numerous occasions because of its importance and significance as one of the decalogue commands.

Rabbi Abraham Heschel describes Judaism as a "religion of time aiming at the sanctification of time."[4] The Sabbath is both a command to uphold as well as a participation in sacred time. The Old Testament speaks extensively on the importance of the Sabbath and some of Jesus' more intense arguments with the Pharisees were over Sabbath restrictions. Even today, both religious and secular Jews practice, or at least recognize the importance of, the Sabbath, taking place from Friday evening through Saturday.[5]

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[2] Eviatar Zerubavel, "The French Republican Calendar: A Case Study in the Sociology of Time," *American Sociological Review* 42, no. 6 (December 1977): 868–877.
[3] Justin Huffman, "Sabbath: An Enduring Principle for the Soul," *The Gospel Coalition*, last modified October 27, 2020, accessed February 20, 2022, https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/sabbath-enduring-principle/.
[4] Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Sabbath* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1951), 8.
[5] Michelle Van Loon, "The Jewish Roots of Christian Sabbath," *Thin Places* (Christianity Today, June 24, 2014), last modified June 24, 2014, accessed March 24, 2022, https://www.christianitytoday.com/amyjuliabecker/2014/june/jewish-roots-of-christian-sabbath.html.

Christian observance of the Sabbath spans a wide range of practices, from absolute adherence as a necessary command to just another Old Testament law overridden by the New Covenant. Those who observe a Sabbath day religiously, whether it is Friday to Saturday as in Jewish practice, or Sunday as determined by a church calendar, are often referred to as Sabbatarians. One of the most well-known Protestant Sabbatarian denominations is the Seventh Day Adventist, whose very name emphasizes the day set apart for rest.[6]

For many pastors in the American evangelical church, there is a healthy debate about the practice of Sabbath. Recently, there seems to be a renewed interest in the practice as articles, books and sermons are prescribing Sabbath as an antidote or pushback to a world of 24/7 availability and busyness. On the other hand, perhaps in an effort to curtail a legalistic practice of Sabbath, other authors and pastors ask the question, "Is Sabbath Required for Christians?"—questioning whether it is the duty of believers today to continue this ostensibly Old Testament exercise.[7]

In spite of renewed interest in Sabbath-keeping, what seems to be the prominent and prevailing view of the Sabbath, at least in the way it is treated, is that it is simply a much-needed day off. For much of the world, and for most followers of Christ, this fits nicely with the modern concept of the weekend. Saturdays and Sundays, at least for a significant portion of the American population, offer not one but two opportunities to practice a Sabbath! Nevertheless, while the weekend may be a good opportunity to Sabbath, time spent away from the office or work is not necessarily a Sabbath.

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[6] "What Adventists Believe about the Sabbath," *Adventist.org* (Seventh-day Adventist Church, August 30, 2021), last modified August 30, 2021, accessed March 24, 2022, https://www.adventist.org/the-sabbath/.
[7] Justin Taylor, "Is the Sabbath Still Required for Christians?," *The Gospel Coalition* (The Gospel Coalition, October 14, 2010), last modified October 14, 2010, accessed March 1, 2022, https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/justin-taylor/schreiner-qa-is-the-sabbath-still-required-for-christians/.

This is particularly true for a specific group of Christ-followers whose weekend calendars do not align with the standard model – pastors. What does Sabbath look like for those who work in and for the church? The overall impression is that a pastor works throughout the week, even more so on Sundays, and thus must take some time or even a full day off. If pastors would just take one day off, although the secular world offers two days, he or she will be fully refreshed for the work of ministry, or so the argument goes.[8] At best, though, this seems to treat Sabbath as the vocational minister's weekend, another tool to be used in the goal of self-care to find downtime and prevent exhaustion. But this view of Sabbath seems too disconnected from its prominence and spiritual necessity throughout the Bible.

Therefore, for the purpose of this thesis-project, Sabbath will be defined as the day of each week set aside for the intentional purpose of resting and remembering who God is and what He has done. On one hand, it is a day to cease work and even the desire or need to work.[9] On the other, Sabbath is a day to trust God with one's life and ministry in a tangible way – by refraining from work. Pastor Eugene Peterson notes that the Sabbath is "not a day to get anything done but a day to watch and be responsive to what God has done."[10] Sabbath observance, then, is not done in slavish obedience to a command or law but rather out of an understanding of the need for rest and trust in God. The focal point of Sabbath is not the human person but rather the Creator God.[11] The gifts of Sabbath, be they rest or restoration, arise from the relationship with the Giver cultivated in this day of divine focus.

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[8] John Broadus, *On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons* (New York: Harper Collins, 2001), 16.
[9] Marva J. Dawn, *Keeping the Sabbath Wholly* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1989), 3.
[10] Eugene H. Peterson, *Working the Angles: The Shape of Pastoral Integrity* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Co., 1987), 82.
[11] Eugene H. Peterson, *Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places: A Conversation in Spiritual Theology* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2005), 150.

This is not to say that the practice of Sabbath offers no personal benefit. Quite the contrary, as is the case with most spiritual disciplines, a practice done out of obedience to God yields significant life-giving and transformative advantages. Intentional Sabbath is not an isolated spiritual activity but coincides with an active prayer life, time of reflection and study of God's Word. Like these other spiritual disciplines, Sabbath offers the Sabbath-taker multiple gifts and benefits. One of these primary gifts of Sabbath is rest, which is one of, if not the, most powerful antidotes to pastoral burnout.

Pastoral Burnout

Exhaustion, anxiety, deep stress, marital issues, loneliness, hopelessness, anger, aggravation, numbness, lack of satisfaction, fatigue, weariness, depression – each of these can describe the inner turmoil that many pastors have experienced at some point in their career. The word that is often used to encompass all these feelings is burnout. Jonathan Malesic defined burnout as: "The angry dread I felt toward my career."[12] Burnout is not isolated to any one profession or people group but "helping professions" tend to experience it more acutely. In their book, *The Resilient Practitioner,* Thomas Skovholt and Michelle Trotter-Mathison describe seven potential causes of burnout: work overload, lack of control, insufficient reward, breakdown of community, unfairness, significant value conflicts, and lack of job fit.[13]

Pastoral ministry, a helping profession, is not immune to the danger of burnout. One pastor described his experience with burnout as feeling like he was on a perpetual treadmill, constantly running further up and faster still, until his "ministry began to feel more like a burden

[12] Jonathan Malesic, *The End of Burnout: Why Work Drains Us and How to Build Better Lives* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2022), 19.
[13] Thomas M. Skovholt and Michelle Trotter-Mathison, *The Resilient Practitioner: Burnout and Compassion Fatigue Prevention and Self-Care Strategies for the Helping Professions* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 106.

than a joy."[14] Another pastor, in an article entitled, "I was burnt out," described himself as searching desperately for a new church, with little attention to theology or fit, simply because he was looking for a quick escape.[15]

A 2021 article in Christianity Today bore the headline "The Pastors Aren't All Right: 38% Consider Leaving Ministry." In it, the author, utilizing a Barna Group survey, revealed that the titular 38% had been deeply affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and had experienced far greater stress and much less satisfaction in ministry in this difficult season.[16] This is not a new trend, nor does it only affect the individual pastor. A study in 2014 found that one third of pastors felt that ministry was an "outright hazard" to their families.[17] A 2016 study by the Francis Schaefer Institute reported that 77% of pastors felt that they did not have a good marriage and saw ministry as a key factor for their dissatisfaction.[18] Perhaps most shockingly, a 2021 poll of 345 pastors in 27 countries, occupying various roles, found that 12% had considered suicide in the past year.[19]

Why are pastors feeling this way? The demands of a ministry calendar throughout the week, evenings, and weekends certainly contribute to the burden. Pastors can become "addicted to a certain level of progress or productivity in ministry," needing to be needed.[20] Interpersonal conflicts between parishioners, which a pastor must navigate and mediate are also fraught with

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[14] Ed Moore, "I Was Burnt Out - And I Stayed In," *9Marks Journal*, no. Summer 2018 (2018), 9.
[15] Moore, "I Was Burnt Out"*, 9.*
[16] Kate Shellnutt, "The Pastors Aren't All Right: 38% Consider Leaving Ministry," *News & Reporting* (Christianity Today, November 16, 2021), last modified November 16, 2021, accessed November 18, 2021, https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2021/november/pastor-burnout-pandemic-barna-consider-leaving-ministry.html.
[17] Travis Collins, *For Ministers about to Start ... or about to Give Up* (Danvers: Travis Collins, 2014), 3.
[18] Richard J Krejcir, "Statistics on Pastors: 2016 Update," *ChurchLeadership.org* (Francis A. Schaeffer Institute of Church Leadership Development, 2016), last modified 2016, accessed January 11, 2022, http://www.churchleadership.org/apps/articles/default.asp?blogid=4545&view=post&articleid=Statistics-on-Pastors-2016-Update&link=1&fldKeywords=&fldAuthor=&fldTopic=0.
[19] Report. *2021 Pastoral Mental Health Report*. FaithLife Corporation, 2021.
[20] Brad Hambrick, *Burnout: Resting in God's Fairness* (Phillipsburg: P & R Publishing, 2013), 32.

emotional weight; and the burden of difficult decisions, painful funerals and hospital visits, weekly sermons, even being attentive to one's family and friends, are also stressors, no matter how positive they may sound. On top of this, family conflicts and lack of friends, coupled with feeling underappreciated by those to whom they minister, can make a pastor feel isolated.[21]

Pastors are men and women who seek to glorify God and desire to serve their fellow man; they have chosen to take on the mantle of leadership, of teaching and preaching the word of God, of counseling, evangelizing, marrying and burying. As pastors, so much emphasis is placed on the things that we know and the things that we do. Seminary makes faith an intellectual exercise to, quite literally, be mastered.[22] Our Sunday sermons, our Bible studies, our home and hospital visits come to define us to our congregations.

Didn't we know this is what we had signed up for? Were we unaware of the difficulties and dangers of ministry? Did our seminaries and theological education do us a disservice or not properly prepare us for the ministry, as some have suggested? Could it be that the demands of the job have become so much in the 21st century that only the most resilient, hard-nosed, and tough Type-A individuals can become pastors?

I certainly do not believe that is the case. However, I do believe that the role of a pastor has its unique responsibilities and difficulties and that this issue of burnout must be addressed. As we continue to see pastors leave their churches, their families and their faith, there is no one-size-fits-all approach to minister to these ministers. Each ministry context is unique. Each pastor

[21] Julie Fickel, "Burnout in Pastors and Church Leadership," *M1 Psychology* (Loganholme Psychologist & Counseling Centre, 2022), last modified 2022, accessed January 14, 2022, https://m1psychology.com/burnout-in-pastors-and-church-leadership/.
[22] Paul David Tripp, *Dangerous Calling: Confronting the Unique Challenges of Pastoral Ministry* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2015), 25.

has his or her own struggles and issues that could exacerbate the feelings of burnout. Ultimately, there is no silver bullet to slay the monster of burnout.

Nevertheless, there are some principles and practices that serve as more than just balm to cover pastoral wounds, but as much-needed medicine to help heal the heart of pastors who feel like giving up. A healthy pastor is tasked with pointing people to God, reminding them of who He is and who they are because of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. In the same way, a pastor must be reminded of these truths himself, particularly that "we are not essential to the completion of God's task" in a person's life or in the world and that we are invited to join God in mission but not achieve it for Him.[23]

Sabbath is one of the most important spiritual practices that reminds human beings of their limitations and of God's continued work in our lives and in the world. The practice of Sabbath, then, is instrumental in not only combatting pastoral burnout and contributing to a greater sense of satisfaction in life, but also transforming a pastor's view of who he is and what he is called to do.

Hypothesis: Pastors Who Sabbath Experience Greater Satisfaction

Many pastors are experiencing burnout, and many do not take a Sabbath; and I believe there is a high degree of correlation between the lack of Sabbath rest and pastoral burnout. Almost 50% of pastors report not even taking a personal day off each week,[24] which means even a "bastard Sabbath," reduced to a mere day off, is something being neglected.[25] But if Sabbath is meant to be more than just a day off; if it is indeed, as this thesis-project suggests, an intentional

[23] David Rohrer, *The Sacred Wilderness of Pastoral Ministry* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 78.
[24] Bill Gaultiere, "Pastor Stress Statistics," *Soul Shepherding*, last modified 2022, accessed January 16, 2022, https://www.soulshepherding.org/pastors-under-stress/.
[25] Eugene H. Peterson, *Working the Angles*, 66.

day each week to rest and refrain from the work of ministry while remembering the goodness of God, how many pastors are doing that?

So, the purpose of this thesis-project is to examine whether an informed and intentional commitment to the practice of Sabbath will have a positive impact on other pastors' satisfaction with life and ministry, as it has mine. The project itself is comprised of two basic parts. The first part involves a general survey of seventy pastors in my relational sphere to determine the connection between Sabbath and ministry satisfaction in their lives. This survey and its outcomes will be reported in chapter one (the current chapter), since it demonstrates a clear correlation between Sabbath and ministry satisfaction or dissatisfaction. In other words, it shows that this is a real problem among pastors in my social context. It also reveals the need for teaching about Sabbath among pastors.

The second part of this thesis-project, reported in chapter four, involves developing and leading a small group of pastors in the study and practice of Sabbath for the sake of personal transformation. The results of this small group experience will be reported through a combination of quantitative and qualitative research in chapter five. Together, the survey and the small group experience will test, and hopefully support, the hypothesis of this thesis-project: that a biblically informed and intentional commitment to weekly Sabbath can have a positive impact on satisfaction in life and ministry.

Questionnaire Design & Results

To collect data on pastors' satisfaction in various areas of a life and ministry, and their practice of and attitudes toward Sabbath, I constructed an anonymous online questionnaire that could be shared via a web link. I then created a list of potential respondents and asked those respondents to complete the questionnaire and share it with other pastors who could also

complete it and provide data. My goal was to collect data from at least 50 pastors across a wide range of demographics to be statistically sound and better test my hypothesis. The link was sent directly to 41 pastors, who passed it along to others. After two months a total of 71 unique responses were collected.

In constructing the questionnaire, I wanted to answer at least the following questions. 1) Did pastors take a regular Sabbath? 2) Had they been taught how to Sabbath? 3) What was their level of satisfaction in various aspects of pastoral life, including but not limited to prayer, time in the Bible, friendships, and family? 4) Was this individual considering leaving vocational ministry (a possible indicator of burnout)? The complete questionnaire, which can be viewed in Appendix 1, consisted of the following four sections:

1) Demographic information

2) Church and pastoral role

3) Levels of satisfaction in life

4) Sabbath information

In Section 1, Questions 1-4 asked about age, sex, marital status and number of children, if any. The goal was to ascertain whether demographic factors might account for either a lack of overall satisfaction or practice of Sabbath. Section 2 consisted of 5 questions about church context: church size, size of the pastoral staff, number of years at the church, number of years in ministry, and particular pastoral role. The goal of these questions was to investigate whether any of these factors might influence the connection between Sabbath and satisfaction.

The third section focused on levels of satisfaction the pastor was experiencing, measured on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from Very Dissatisfied on one end of the spectrum, to Neither Dissatisfied nor Satisfied in the middle, to Very Satisfied on the other end. This section was the

longest with 9 questions and respondents were asked to evaluate their personal level of satisfaction in their current church context, their time with God in prayer, time with God in the Bible, their relationship with God, their relationships with others, attentiveness to family, and their spouse (or closest individual relationship in the case of single or divorced respondents). The final question in Section 3 asked respondents how seriously they are considering leaving vocational ministry in the next year on a 5-point scale from Very Seriously to Not at All.

The fourth and final section of the survey asked three questions about Sabbath. The first was, "How often do you take a Sabbath (defined as "One day set aside intentionally each week to rest from work/ministry")? The five possible responses were: I Don't, Rarely, Sometimes (Once per month), Often (2-3 times per month), Always (Weekly). The second question was True or False: Someone taught me what a Sabbath is and what it looks like. Finally, upon completing the survey, the pastor was asked to answer, True or False: I believe a weekly Sabbath is important in my life and ministry. Again, a copy of this questionnaire is available in Appendix 1.

The data from this questionnaire was highly instructive. Perhaps surprisingly, the demographic data of age, sex, marital status, number or age of children, church size, pastoral role, and years in ministry appeared to offer little variance in terms of levels of satisfaction or whether pastors were practicing Sabbath. This is an important and helpful observation for evaluating my hypothesis. For example, it is not the case that only men experience dissatisfaction in their marriage or ministry. Nor is it the case that only Senior Pastors are less satisfied with their time in the Bible or in prayer. Furthermore, and most compellingly for my hypothesis, it was not only one group or subsection of the population of respondents that were not practicing Sabbath. In other words, it was not only young men or solo pastors or Youth Pastors who were

dissatisfied and not practicing Sabbath. The data suggests that there is a correlation between satisfaction in ministry and Sabbath irrespective of other factors.

Of the 71 respondents, there was an almost equal split between those who Always Sabbath – 16 individuals, and those who Never Do – 19 individuals. The fact that these two sample groups are similar in size is helpful for assessing the data collected. However, when the data set was expanded to include those who took a Sabbath regularly, Always and Often (2-3 times per month), this positive case group increased to 37 individuals. Similarly, the group of pastors who reported Never Taking a Sabbath or doing so Rarely, added to that set of data, numbering 32 unique individuals. Only 2 respondents out of 71 indicated they take a Sabbath Sometimes (once per month), so I excluded them from the data evaluation and instead focused my study on the two groups of Always/Often and Never/Rarely.

When the data is analyzed, the differences between these two groups of pastors were quite stark. In every question regarding satisfaction level, those who rarely or never took a Sabbath indicated lower levels of satisfaction by at least 1 and, in some cases, almost 2 points on the 7-point scale.

Table 1: Data on Pastoral Satisfaction[26]

Satisfaction Level	Never / Rarely Sabbath	Always / Often Sabbath
Church	3.53	5.73
Prayer Life	4.07	5.46
Time in Bible	4.09	5.51
Relationship with God	4.79	5.89
Friendships	4.41	5.14

[26] Appendix One, Pastoral Sabbath & Satisfaction Survey, December 2021.

Church Members	3.72	5.30
Attentiveness to Family	4.47	6.16
Spouse	4.81	6.41

The data yields information not just on satisfaction with the church and its members, but also satisfaction levels with practices of the Christian faith. Pastors who did not take a regular Sabbath reported less satisfaction with their prayer life, their time in the Bible and their overall relationship with God. Once again, the difference between the two groups is not insignificant. This research demonstrates higher levels of spiritual satisfaction for pastors who Sabbath.

Additionally, Sabbath practice seems to correlate to satisfaction within the pastor's inner circle of family and friends as well. The only question in which respondents who never/rarely Sabbath scored close to those who do concerned friendships. Sadly, the data on familial satisfaction was more drastic. Pastors who Sabbath responded that they were more satisfied with their level of attentiveness to their families, and more satisfied with their relationship with their spouse (or closest friend).

Summarizing the data from this survey, pastors who Sabbath regularly responded with greater levels of satisfaction in every area of the questionnaire. Pastors who did not Sabbath regularly indicated lower levels of satisfaction across the board. This is quite telling and also brings up a question regarding satisfaction and burnout. Does lack of satisfaction lead to burnout, particularly to the point that an individual would leave their church or ministry?

Once again, I divided respondents into the same two groups of Never/Rarely Sabbath, consisting of 32 individuals, and Always/Often, consisting of 37 respondents. I then looked at the question about how seriously a respondent was considering leaving vocational ministry in the

next year. The 5 options were Very Seriously, Seriously, Potentially, Not Seriously, Not Considering at All. Once again, the data from this survey demonstrated a distinct difference in the two groups of respondents.

Roughly 80% of pastors who rarely or never Sabbath indicated that they very seriously, seriously or potentially were considering leaving ministry in the next twelve months. On the other hand, a similar percentage of slightly more than 80% of pastors who always or often Sabbath responded that they were not seriously or not at all considering leaving vocational ministry. In each group, there were individuals who responded that they were or were not considering leaving ministry, but the data once again shows a distinct variance in those who do and do not practice Sabbath. This data is reflected in the table below in percentages that have been rounded up or down to the nearest point.

Table 2: Data on Pastors Considering Leaving Vocational Ministry

Considering Leaving Ministry	Never / Rarely Sabbath	Always / Often Sabbath
Very Seriously	22%	8%
Seriously	31%	3%
Potentially	28%	8%
Not Seriously	6%	30%
Not Considering At All	13%	51%

The separation between these two groups on this particular question, the issue of leaving ministry, was even more striking in the two most definitive groups of individuals who never Sabbath and those that report Always Practicing Sabbath. Of the 19 respondents who reported Never Taking a Sabbath, 11 were Seriously or Very Seriously considering leaving ministry in the

next year. The 16 respondents who report Always Taking Sabbath had only 2 individuals Seriously or Very Seriously thinking about a departure from ministry, although both responded Very Seriously.

Two final considerations from the data remain: whether these pastors were taught how to Sabbath and if they believe a personal Sabbath is important to life and ministry. Although this data does not address the connection between Sabbath and satisfaction, it does lay a foundation for the second part of the thesis-project, which is itself an attempt to teach pastors both the importance of Sabbath and how to practice Sabbath.

The statistics from the group of pastors who Never/Rarely take a Sabbath show that 75% were not taught how to Sabbath, meaning only 25% were taught what a personal Sabbath looks like. Nevertheless, 68% of this group still indicated that they believe a Sabbath is important in life and ministry, though they never or rarely practice a weekly day of rest. In stark contrast, 55% of the pastors who Always/Often take a Sabbath, said that they were taught how to Sabbath. And every single one of these 37 pastors, 100%, answered that a Sabbath is important.

For these sixty-nine pastors this research questionnaire clearly demonstrates a correlation between the practice of Sabbath and the satisfaction level of pastors with their work, and in their relationships with their families, friends and members of their church, and even their relationship with God. The figures also suggest that Sabbath practice likely plays a role in whether or not these pastors are considering leaving their church. Finally, this survey also establishes that many of those who do not Sabbath were never taught how to do so. And what is true of these sixty-nine pastors may very well be true of pastors in general.

Project Proposal: Teaching Sabbath through a Pastoral Mountain Cohort

Having conducted the questionnaire and analyzed the information gained from it, I was able to test the basic validity of my hypothesis – that pastors who Sabbath experience greater levels of satisfaction in life and in ministry – and also to uncover the need of pastors to be taught about Sabbath and trained to practice it, which leads to the second part of the thesis-project. For this second part, I will take a small group of pastors to the wilderness of the Rocky Mountains in Colorado for a four-day Sabbath retreat, where we will climb mountains, camp under the stars, discuss ministry and life around a campfire, and dig deeply into the biblical idea of Sabbath. This pastoral mountain cohort has four primary objectives: to teach pastors what a Sabbath is, clarify how to effectively take a weekly Sabbath, incite them to commit to doing so for a specific period of time, and to encourage them in their Sabbath journey. I believe that teaching Sabbath to pastors and encouraging pastors to Sabbath in a significant and memorable way will contribute to the overall goal of helping individuals incorporate Sabbath as a practice into their life and ministry.

I believe that this particular method, a trip to the mountains, will be more effective than a series of meetings, a seminar or even a weekly gathering, for three fundamental reasons. First, this mountain retreat will encourage pastors to disengage and rest from work and ministry by leaving one's sphere of living. Second, by creating a cohort, this group of individuals will have a band of co-ministers with which to learn and pursue Sabbath practice as a working principle. Third, by stepping out of their usual context and stepping into a wilderness environment, I believe the cohort will be more open to God's leading in this area of their lives.

On the first point – the need to leave one's typical setting – I will essentially be asking pastors to incorporate a new habit into their lives. This is not an insignificant undertaking.

However, it is easier to form a new habit or break an old one when separated from one's typical rhythms.[27] In my own experience, times when I have gone somewhere or left my usual surroundings are often the greatest opportunities for learning. In my own Sabbath journey, I both learned about the practice and committed to trying it while I was away, on a 2-week residency at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in Hamilton, Massachusetts. The combination of teaching and being outside of my typical sphere of influence and distraction was essential to my own pledge to begin a Sabbath.

Secondly, I believe a small group of confidants will be more effective than a larger collection of pastors or some sort of conference in helping pastors learn about and commit to a Sabbath practice. In *Canoeing the Mountains*, Tod Bolsinger describes "confidants" as outsiders to one's organization who are more interested in and care more for the person, leader, or pastor than their organization.[28] My goal will be to gather a group of pastors from a variety of churches and even a diversity of roles to form this cohort. More details about cohort formation, ideal group size, and group demographics can be found in chapter four.

Lastly, the wilderness setting of this Sabbath-teaching experience should provide a powerful inspiration for this cohort to actually enter into a Sabbath experiment. God gave His people the 10 commandments, including the command to Sabbath, in the wilderness. "Moses taught the people in the wilderness that the Sabbath was not a regular day – it was a day for retreat – for rest."[29] Jesus often withdrew to wild places to pray and called His disciples to do the same. Furthermore, Dr. Ashley Denton, director of the Wilderness Ministry Institute, notes that

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[27] Justin Whitmel Earley, *The Common Rule: Habits of Purpose for an Age of Distraction* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2019), 9.
[28] Tod Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains: Christian Leadership in Uncharted Territory* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 159.
[29] Ashley Denton, *Christian Outdoor Leadership* (Fort Collins: Smooth Stone Publishing, 2011), 71.

"Jesus promoted experiential learning by doing much of his teaching outdoors."[30] Theological foundations for the wilderness as a place for rest, testing, and communion with God will be discussed in the following chapter.

My goal with taking pastors out of their typical environment and guiding them into a wilderness environment is to teach the need for rest and remembering by doing those two things in a unique and memorable way. Sabbath rest need not, and even should not, simply be a day of vegetative lounging in front of the television. Rather, Sabbath rest, as we will discuss further, can and should include re-creation and even activity that is restful. The mountains, then, and the stress of its environment can contribute to the learning goals of Sabbath. As the difficulty of a different type of stressor increases, learning can also increase.[31]

At the end of the Sabbath retreat, I will ask each individual to commit to three things: First, to take a day of Sabbath weekly for a period of 10 weeks; second, to journal about their experience each week and be willing to share their experience with me after the 10-week period; third, to encourage the others in the group as they experience the Sabbath journey together.

By guiding this cohort of pastors through a Sabbath retreat and encouraging them to incorporate Sabbath into their weekly rhythm as a pastor, I want to help individual pastors experience the power of this spiritual practice. Furthermore, it is my hope that the 10-week experience will become a lifelong practice and that it will flow out of their lives into their families, churches, and circles of influence.

If the practice of Sabbath can help just one pastor avoid burnout and find greater satisfaction in multiple realms of life, I believe this project will be a success. As pastors, I believe we can be leaders in thought and action as we seek to rest and remember who God is,

[30] Denton, *Christian Outdoor Leadership*, 21.
[31] Denton, *Christian Outdoor Leadership*, 36.

what He has done, and what He does in our lives and ministries even and especially when we rest in Him.

CHAPTER TWO

BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATION

As demonstrated in the previous chapter, the stressors placed on pastors can lead to a myriad of negative outcomes. These include, but are certainly not limited to, depression and departure from vocational ministry. The data from the pastoral satisfaction questionnaire demonstrated that pastors who practiced a weekly day of rest experience greater satisfaction in life and ministry. Sabbath rest, then, can be seen as a necessary tool as well as a healthy practice to encourage satisfaction and ensure that pastors have longer and healthier careers. In *Preventing Ministry Failure*, a guide for vocational ministers, the authors suggest that pastors "must create space to ensure adequate rest" and briefly define a Sabbath rest as prioritized downtime which will help to restore the necessary energy to continue to live out one's calling to ministry.[1]

But is that all the Sabbath is intended to be? While both anecdotal and statistical data demonstrate the benefits of a weekly day of rest, a Sabbath day reduced to mere downtime is a superficial view of the actual biblical description of the Sabbath, and the command to honor, keep, or remember the Sabbath day as holy. To gain a more holistic attitude and approach to the Sabbath, it is imperative to understand the biblical and theological foundation for a weekly day of rest.

This chapter will explore the Old Testament command to practice the Sabbath, followed by the definition and explanation of Sabbath that Jesus provides in the New Testament. Then, because this thesis project will include teaching pastors to practice a Sabbath via a mountain

[1] Michael Todd Wilson and Brad Hoffmann, *Preventing Ministry Failure: A Shepherd Care Guide for Pastors, Ministers and Other Caregivers* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 125.

retreat, this chapter will also briefly describe the role of the wilderness as a place of rest and transformation.

The Biblical Beginning of Sabbath

In the beginning, according to Genesis 1:1, God created the heavens and the earth—everything—from nothing. Day after creation day, He spoke the entire universe and everything it contains into existence. Then He finished His work and rested. Thus, Genesis 2:2-3 institutes the principle of Sabbath and roots it firmly in the creation work of God.

> And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation.[2]

The word Sabbath comes from the Hebrew word *shabbat* which means simply "to stop" or "to rest" and, significantly, God is the first person in the Bible to do this. After six full days of creating, God finishes the work He has been doing, and then He chooses to rest. Moreover, in ceasing from His creative work and resting on this seventh day, God blesses this day and makes it holy, sanctifying and setting it apart for Himself. Certainly, all the days of creation belong to Him, and yet this specific day is set aside as uniquely holy. In the Bible, people, places, things, and even time can be holy. "To declare something holy is to indicate that it is out of the ordinary" and that it is uniquely significant to God.[3]

It is important to notice that God's day of rest does not include an obvious command for human beings to do the same. In the narrative of Genesis two, God does not direct Adam and Eve to work for six days and rest on the seventh in accordance with His own pattern. So, before examining Sabbath as a command to be kept, perhaps Sabbath should be pondered as something consecrated by God and to God, maybe even a sacred rhythm built into the very created order.

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[2] Scripture references are from the English Standard Version (2001).
[3] Kent Blevins, "Observing Sabbath," *Review & Expositor* 113, no. 4 (November 2016): 478-487, 479.

According to the author of Genesis, the institution of the Sabbath day does not begin on Mount Sinai or in Mosaic law, but in the primeval first week of all God's handiwork. A.J. Swoboda, emphasizing the natural importance of the Sabbath, asserts that it is "built into the DNA of creation, and it is therefore something creation needs in order to flourish."[4] On the first day, God creates the earth out of the chaotic water (Gen. 1:1-2). Each consecutive day begins and ends with a rhythm of creation and blessing, God creating, calling His creation "good" and the passage of time, evening to morning.

In chapter 2, the author of Genesis tells us that the heavens and the earth were "finished," (Gen. 2:1) that on the seventh day God Himself "finished his work" (Gen. 2:2) and that because of this He rested and blessed the seventh day and made it holy (Gen. 2:3-4). The blessing of the seventh day in verse 3 brings a sense of completion to the creation account. God established a rhythm of time when He created light and initiated a cycle of night and day. On the seventh day, the author does not use the rhythm of evening and morning, instead declaring that God finished His work and rested. God's ability to rest signifies the completion and culmination of His created order in the Universe.

Dr. Richard Lowery asserts, "Sabbath is woven into the very fabric of the universe, the thread that holds the world together."[5] Genesis 2 demonstrates the greater "cosmic relevance of the Sabbath" and its highlighted place in the creation story imbues it with universal meaning.[6] The Sabbath is not initiated in Exodus or in the covenant with God's people at Sinai but rather in

[4] A.J. Swoboda, *Subversive Sabbath* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2018), 11.
[5] Richard H Lowery, "Sabbath, a 'Little Jubilee,'" Christian Reflection (Baylor University, 2002), https://www.baylor.edu/ifl/christianreflection/SabbatharticleLowery.pdf, 13.
[6] Pieter G.R. de Villiers and George Marchinkowski, "Sabbath-Keeping in the Bible from the Perspective of Biblical Spirituality," *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 77, no. 2 (July 30, 2021), 4.

the first ever seventh day. God Himself rests and, in so doing, demonstrates how creation itself can rest.

The Biblical Command for Sabbath Rest

The shift from divine action to a specific directive for God's people to rest and practice Sabbath first appears in the biblical narrative in Exodus and is reaffirmed in Deuteronomy. Founded in the Genesis account of creation, the Sabbath now becomes an explicit command for God's people to rest and remember God's act of rest on the seventh day. In both Exodus 16:22-30 and Exodus 20:8-11, the Sabbath is instituted as a day set apart as holy for the purpose of rest. The emphasis in both passages, the latter being the Ten Commandments, is to keep the Sabbath holy by refraining from work, because that is what God did in creation. The people are called to rest because God rested. In Deuteronomy chapter 5, the command is further developed to include remembering what God has done in the lives of His people, primarily rescuing them out of slavery. These primal meanings of the Sabbath day—to rest and remember – are the foundation of the Jewish Sabbath tradition of lighting two candles: to rest because God rested and to remember that God has redeemed His people.[7]

Rest: A Day Set Apart

The first mention of Sabbath in the Exodus narrative occurs after their rescue from slavery in Egypt, but before the giving of the Commandments on Sinai. One month after leaving Egypt, God begins providing manna for His people to eat in the wilderness, and in Exodus 16 Moses gives instructions about collecting it. He commands the people to gather twice as much food on the sixth day of the week because they are not to gather anything on the seventh. So significant is this direction, that David Frankel considers the great "theological burden" of the

[7] Marva J. Dawn, *Keeping the Sabbath Wholly* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1989), 11.

text, not the miraculous provision of manna from heaven, but "the Sabbath institution that it introduces."[8]

Exodus 16:22-30

> On the sixth day, they gathered twice as much—two omers for each person—and the leaders of the community came and reported this to Moses. He said to them, "This is what the Lord commanded: 'Tomorrow is to be a day of sabbath rest, a holy sabbath to the Lord. So bake what you want to bake and boil what you want to boil. Save whatever is left and keep it until morning.'" So they saved it until morning, as Moses commanded, and it did not stink or get maggots in it. "Eat it today," Moses said, "because today is a sabbath to the Lord. You will not find any of it on the ground today. Six days you are to gather it, but on the seventh day, the Sabbath, there will not be any." Nevertheless, some of the people went out on the seventh day to gather it, but they found none. Then the Lord said to Moses, "How long will you refuse to keep my commands and my instructions? Bear in mind that the Lord has given you the Sabbath; that is why on the sixth day he gives you bread for two days. Everyone is to stay where they are on the seventh day; no one is to go out." So the people rested on the seventh day.

This passage offers the first set of biblical instructions for how the people of God are to keep the Sabbath holy. Moses gives specific guidelines for gathering manna during the first six days of the week, which mirror God's creative work in creation, and then he prohibits gathering on the seventh day. Additionally, God will not provide manna on the seventh day; instead, a double portion is given on the sixth day. Most importantly, Moses says that "The Lord has given you the Sabbath." This is language that clearly demonstrates a gift of rest rather than a burden of deprivation or lack of food.

At this point in the Exodus narrative, God has not given His people the Ten Commandments, nor have the ceremonial or holiness laws been instituted. Exodus 16 is a clear command, however, with two distinct Sabbath prohibitions – not gathering manna or going out on that day. So, the Sabbath becomes a day "set apart from the ordinary and dedicated to God" as a day of special rest that God blesses beforehand with a double helping of manna and for which

[8] David Frankel, "The Priestly Conception of the Sabbath in Exodus 16," *Biblische Zeitschrift* 59, no. 2 (2015): 208-231, 208.

Israel must anticipate and prepare.[9] Human rest on the seventh day becomes a replication of God's divine rest and cessation of activity in Genesis 2.[10]

Part of the surplus of food is pragmatic, in that God is not requiring His people to fast, so He provides food on a day when they cannot attain it for themselves. However, as biblical commentator Brevard Childs notes, there is a theme of joy present on the Sabbath as well. It is "not a day to go hungry and mourn" but to enjoy what God has given.[11] And yet, even in Exodus 16, it is clear that "not all the people were enjoying the sabbath."[12] The passage demonstrates a clear violation of the command to keep the Sabbath holy. Some of the people go looking for food anyway but come away empty-handed. God had already taken care of their needs but some within the community, either seeking to store up more for themselves or simply not trusting God to continue to provide, break the command to rest and gain nothing.

This lack of faith causes God to ask Moses, "How long will you refuse to keep my commands and my instructions?" Working on the day of rest is, effectively, a "denial of God's direct activity in the field during the week."[13] It is as if the people, having seen God's continued activity in their lives in the desert, cannot bring themselves to trust that it will endure and ask, "What have you done for me lately?" On the other hand, obedience to God in the task of keeping the Sabbath day demonstrates faith and trust in His commitment to Israel. The people are able to rest because of their faith in a God who also rested, and who provides all they need.

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[9] Brevard S. Childs, *The Book of Exodus* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1974), 290.
[10] Stephen A. Geller, "Manna and Sabbath," *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology* 59, no. 1 (January 2005): 5-16, 8.
[11] Childs, *The Book of Exodus,* 290.
[12] Childs, *The Book of Exodus,* 290.
[13] David Frankel, "The Priestly Conception of the Sabbath in Exodus 16," 227.

After this episode in Israel's history, and four chapters later in Exodus, God gives His people the Ten Commandments. Here, in the fourth command of the Decalogue, is a declarative command to keep the Sabbath holy.

Exodus 20:8-11

> "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

Walter Brueggemann asserts that this Sabbath command, which uses "the most airtime at the mountain," would have shocked its first hearers, who were accustomed to a ceaseless life of slavery in Egypt under Pharoah.[14] A mandate to rest, first given in Exodus 16 and now codified in Exodus 20, establishes a new pattern and rhythm of life for a people who had little or no idea of what it meant to rest. When Exodus 23 reiterates this Sabbath command, once again including both slaves and foreigners, it adds the significant purpose statement—that in resting on the seventh day they "may be refreshed" (Ex. 23:12).

But the Sabbath was not inaugurated as a dictate only for a group of people who were formerly slaves, because the Sabbath was not given for the first time at Sinai, or even with the provision of manna in the wilderness. Rather, in both instances, Israel is being reminded of what has been a special day from the very beginning.[15] At Sinai the Sabbath ordinance is tied directly back to creation. Exodus 20:11 reminds the people that God crafted the universe in six days and rested on the seventh, blessing that day and making it holy. Part of what is included in the Sabbath command, therefore, is a "positive theology of work" which demonstrates that rest is not

[14] Walter Brueggemann, *Sabbath as Resistance* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014), 27.
[15] Childs, *The Book of Exodus, 416.*

an escape from something negative but a fulfillment of that which can also be good.[16] God worked, then He rested. So, too, human beings are commanded to remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy as a memorial of God's work in creation and His day of rest.

The placement of the Sabbath command among the other ten is also important. Matthew Sleeth describes the fourth commandment as "a fulcrum" between the first three commands about God and the final six about humankind.[17] The first three commandments each detail the proper worship of God as the only God, with the first commandment being simply to worship no other gods (Ex. 20:3). The second commandment is a prohibition against idols, anything that a person might worship instead of God (Ex. 20:4-6). The third commandment forbids profaning God's name, implying that it is to be set apart as holy (Ex. 20:7). Then, the Sabbath commandment guides God's people to set aside one day "on which the supreme activity of Israel is to turn to her God."[18] The juxtaposition between this commandment and the others demonstrates that it is not merely a command for time off, but a decree of communal sacred time.

The fourth commandment is placed as a sort of capstone on the first three commandments, which emphasize God's holiness. The Sabbath command also serves as a type of introduction for the next six commandments; these six commandments each have to do with how a person should interact with other members of his or her community. In a sense, God's law is communicating to the people that, because God is holy, His people should honor Him by resting from their work and turning completely to Him one day in seven, and that a community

[16] Gerald A Klingbeil, "The Sabbath Law in the Decalogue(s): Creation and Liberation as a Paradigm for Community," *Revue Biblique* 117, no. 4 (December 4, 2010): 491-509, 501.
[17] Sleeth, *24/6*, 23.
[18] "The Sabbath," *The Next Faithful Step* (Fuller Seminary, 2022), last modified 2022, accessed April 12, 2022, https://www.fuller.edu/next-faithful-step/resources/sabbath/.

which honors God as holy should also treat their parents, neighbors, and community with honor as well.[19]

Kent Blevins reasons that the Sabbath command is "fundamentally a community-organizing principle" due to its unequivocal inclusion of young and old, male and female, parents and children, servants, animals, and even foreigners.[20] The Sabbath is an equalizing commandment for all individuals inside and even outside the circle of God's people. The inclusion of foreigners in the Sabbath commandment is especially meaningful since most Old Testament laws prohibited foreign participation. The clearest example of this is the exclusion of foreign participation in the Passover meal (Ex. 12:43). Sabbath observance, however, is a universal ordinance required even of foreigners who are living within the community.

The Sabbath is a day set apart, originally sanctified in Genesis 2. Mankind is invited to participate in the Sabbath, starting in Exodus 16. It is then codified for the Israelites, God's people, as they are commanded in Exodus 20 to keep this day holy by observing it as a day of rest. The charge to Sabbath continues throughout the Old Testament, but the command expands to include a new facet of meaning. In Exodus 31 and then, when Moses restates the Ten Commandments in the book of Deuteronomy, the Sabbath takes on another dimension as a day set apart by a people set apart.

Remember: A People Set Apart

Tim Keller suggests that the community boundary of a Sabbath day was an extraordinary limitation which, on the surface, would seem to make the Israelites less productive and prosperous than their neighbors. But the Sabbath ordinance was given as a law and a sign

[19] Brueggemann, *Sabbath as Resistance*, 31.
[20] Kent Blevins, "Observing Sabbath," *Review & Expositor* 113, no. 4 (November 2016): 478-487, 482.

between God and His people of the special covenant relationship they were being invited into. The Israelites are now set apart just as the Sabbath day is set apart, and by observing one day of the week as different from the rest, the people are reminded of this deep truth.

Two primary passages demonstrate the Sabbath command to remember Israel's status as God's chosen people. The first, Exodus 31:12-17, defines the Sabbath day as a sign to God's people that they have been sanctified and are now a part of a covenant relationship forever. Additionally, punishment for breaking the Sabbath is instituted, amplifying the seriousness not only of the day but of the identity of God's chosen people.

Exodus 31:12-17

> And the Lord said to Moses, "You are to speak to the people of Israel and say, 'Above all you shall keep my Sabbaths, for this is a sign between me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I, the Lord, sanctify you. You shall keep the Sabbath, because it is holy for you. Everyone who profanes it shall be put to death. Whoever does any work on it, that soul shall be cut off from among his people. Six days shall work be done, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of solemn rest, holy to the Lord. Whoever does any work on the Sabbath day shall be put to death. Therefore the people of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, observing the Sabbath throughout their generations, as a covenant forever. It is a sign forever between me and the people of Israel that in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested and was refreshed.'"

In Exodus 16, gathering food on the Sabbath was met with a reprimand accompanied by a reminder of the purpose of the day of rest. In Exodus 31, however, the penalty for working on the Sabbath is the death penalty. The threat of capital punishment is repeated twice in these six verses, magnifying the peril of disobedience. While the shift in tone toward punishment seems drastic, Exodus 31 affirms the same Sabbath principles as the previous passages, grounding the command in God's creation and commanding people to rest because God rested. But the new language of a death sentence for noncompliance is accompanied by the grander motif of the covenant between God and the Israelites. God declares that an important reason to keep the

Sabbath holy is because it is a sign for the current and future generations that God has "sanctified" His people. God sanctified one day of the week and now He tells the people that they also are set apart for a special covenant relationship with the creator of the universe. The Sabbath does not lose its connection to creation, but instead takes on a new layer of meaning as a reminder between God and Israel of the covenantal bond which was intended from the very beginning of creation.[21]

This reference to the Sabbath as a sign of a covenant relationship is a theme that continues throughout the Old Testament, specifically in the book of Ezekiel. Israel's identity is that of a people being sanctified by God, set apart for Him (Eze 20:12). While the Sabbath of creation is for all human beings, the Sabbath is also decreed as an intentional sign for a specific people group. As Tilden Edwards insightfully suggests, "the creation story is particularized into the creation of a people."[22] God is the grand sanctifier, both of a day on the cosmic scale as well as of a people group on a national level. The Sabbath command is part of "an ongoing process of development in obedience" as God continues to sanctify and consecrate His people for Himself.[23]

In Exodus 31:17, for the first time, the Scriptures indicate that on the day God rested, He was refreshed. The Hebrew word used in this verse means "to take a breath," and it is the same one used in Exodus 23 to refer to the refreshment of slaves and foreigners on the Sabbath. The language of breathing connotes a rhythm, an exhale and an inhale, creation and cessation, work and rest. The people of God are commanded to enter into that same rhythm or risk being cut off from the relationship which gives them air to breathe in the first place. Sabbath rest is not simply

[21] Childs, *The Book of Exodus,* 416.
[22] Tilden Edwards, *Sabbath Time* (Nashville: Upper Room Books, 1992), 21.
[23] "The Sabbath," *The Next Faithful Step* (Fuller Seminary, 2022), last modified 2022, accessed April 12, 2022, https://www.fuller.edu/next-faithful-step/resources/sabbath/.

for rest but for transformation, as God has sanctified and continues to sanctify His people through this rhythm.[24]

The second passage that calls Israel to remember its new identity as God's chosen people occurs when Moses restates the Law in the book of Deuteronomy. Mark Buchanan suggests that while Genesis and Exodus look to creation as the groundwork for Sabbath rest, "Deuteronomy grounds it in liberation."[25]

Deuteronomy 5:12-15

> "'Observe the Sabbath day, to keep it holy, as the Lord your God commanded you. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter or your male servant or your female servant, or your ox or your donkey or any of your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates, that your male servant and your female servant may rest as well as you. You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the Lord your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day.

When Moses reiterates the Ten Commandments in Deuteronomy, the fourth commandment remains largely the same; but there are also subtle differences that demonstrate the Sabbath as an identity-shaping command for God's people. Liberation from slavery is the key theme of the command to observe the Sabbath in Deuteronomy.[26] The stated reason for Sabbath observance here, for the first time, is not to rest because God rested after creation but to remember Israel's history of slavery in Egypt and that it was God who rescued them.
Tim Keller refers to the Sabbath command in Deuteronomy as a "reenactment of the emancipation from slavery."[27] As the Israelites are standing on the precipice of entering their

[24] Brueggemann, *Sabbath as Resistance*, 45.
[25] Mark Buchanan, *The Rest of God* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 2006), 87.
[26] Gerald A Klingbeil, "The Sabbath Law in the Decalogue(s): Creation snd Liberation as a Paradigm for Community," 506.
[27] Keller, "The Power of Deep Rest."

Promised Land, a physical place set apart for them, Moses reminds them of the Ten Commandments and their personal history. The language here reminds the people, who were not even a full generation removed from Egypt, of their experience as slaves. The people of God can rest because their identity has been transformed and they are no longer slaves. The commandment to refrain from work is not a burden; it "is a condition of liberty."[28] The Promised Land "was [to be] a land of free people."[29]

Deuteronomy 5 demonstrates that the social and cultural situation for the Israelites has changed tremendously. In the past they were once slaves; now they have male and female servants themselves. Walter Brueggemann, in his commentary on Deuteronomy, clarifies that servanthood among the Israelites is much different than what they themselves had experienced in Egypt. This makes it even more significant that these servants are also included in the weekly Sabbath day of rest.[30] While Exodus 20 included male and female servants in Sabbath rest because God rested, Deuteronomy 5 includes servants because Israel was once enslaved but God has brought them out. Therefore, the theological concern of the Sabbath command is that the entire community take part in the Sabbath and the only way this is possible is for servants to participate as well.[31] They, too, must be refreshed.

The Sabbath is woven throughout Israel's history, from creation in the book of Genesis, through the wilderness of Exodus to Mt. Sinai and then, in Deuteronomy, to the doorstep of the Promised Land. God set one day apart, sanctifying it, and He did the same for the Israelites,

[28] Buchanan, *The Rest of God,* 90.
[29] Tim Keller, "The Power of Deep Rest," *The Gospel Coalition*, last modified November 25, 2012, accessed April 10, 2022. https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/the-power-of-deep-rest/.
[30] Walter Brueggemann, *Deuteronomy* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2008), 73-75.
[31] Childs, *The Book of Exodus,* 417.

sanctifying them. Thus, "what happened at creation is relevant for the people of God for the rest of their existence."[32] The Sabbath is a day set apart for a people who have been set apart.

Jesus and the Sabbath

Having explored four passages from the Old Testament detailing the Sabbath command to rest and remember, it is now appropriate to focus on Jesus, whose life, ministry, and teaching all contribute to a greater and more holistic theology of rest and Sabbath. Jesus is unambiguous in the Sermon on the Mount when He declares that He is not doing away with the Old Testament laws. He is the fulfillment of them (Matt. 5:17). The relationship between God and humanity was focused upon a particular people group via the covenant bond with Israel that God initiated in Exodus. But in Christ, a new covenant has been established (Mark 14:24), which included both Jews and Gentiles in the people of God. Thus Old Testament commands and practices take on new or renewed dimensions.

One thing that seems clear in the Gospel narrative is that, according to the Pharisees, Jesus disobeyed the Sabbath command, most egregiously and consistently, by healing sick people. In Matthew's biography, Jesus heals a man with a withered hand in a synagogue (Matt. 12:9-14). In the Gospel of Mark, Jesus casts out a demon (Mark 1:21-28), heals Peter's mother-in-law (Mark 1:29-31) and a man with a lame hand in a synagogue (Mark 3:1-6), likely the same man recorded in Matthew. In Luke, Jesus heals a crippled woman in a synagogue (Luke 13:10-17) as well as a man with "dropsy" (an abnormal swelling of bodily fluid) in the home of a Pharisee (Luke 14:1-6). And finally, in John's Gospel, Jesus heals a paralyzed man at the pool of Bethesda (John 5:1-18) as well as a blind beggar on the streets of Jerusalem (John 9:1-16).

[32] Pieter G.R. de Villiers and George Marchinkowski, "Sabbath-Keeping in the Bible from the Perspective of Biblical Spirituality," 6.

Each of these acts of healing was intentionally provocative: performed in front of a crowd, often including religious leaders, and typically accompanied with a question about what is right and good to do on the Sabbath. Jesus' brashness in disobeying the Sabbath, in fact, became one of the primary motivations for His enemies to conspire to kill Him (John 5:18). However, what Jesus was breaking was not the biblical command to Sabbath but rather the religious traditions that had grown up around the Sabbath commandment.

What is at stake between Jesus and the religious leaders of his day is most clearly revealed in a Sabbath episode recorded by all three synoptic Gospels. Matthew 12:1-8, Mark 2:23-28, and Luke 6:1-5 each relate the incident of Jesus and His disciples walking through a grain field on a Sabbath. Matthew tells us that the disciples were hungry, and all three Gospel writers share that the disciples began to pick heads of grain and eat them. None of the Gospels clearly indicate whether Jesus ate the grain, but He certainly did not ask His disciples to refrain from eating.

On the contrary, when confronted by Pharisees who witness this so-called harvesting of grain, Jesus defends His disciples by providing a biblical context for what they are doing and then issuing a theological pronouncement about His authority. First, Jesus compares the disciples' act of eating grain to David and his companions eating consecrated bread (1 Sam. 21:1-6). In Matthew's account, he also equates what the disciples are doing to what the priests did in the Temple, working on the Sabbath by offering sacrifices (Num. 28:9-10).

In both Old Testament cases the individuals do seem to be breaking a commandment. In David's case, the bread really was set apart as holy (Ex. 29:32-34), to be eaten only by priest. Is Jesus, then, condoning breaking biblical law? Probably not, since he so clearly asserted his intention to fulfill it in Mathew 7. But Jesus is demonstrating the inconsistency of the Pharisees'

interpretation of the Law. Why do they not condemn King David for eating sacred bread, a clearly prohibited action, if they denounce Jesus' disciples for gleaning wheat in a field on the Sabbath, which is prohibited nowhere in Sacred Scripture?

Jesus then reminds His critics of priests working on the Sabbath, tending to their assigned duties. If the Pharisees can dictate what is and isn't illegal on the Sabbath, which they have been doing by adding work prohibitions that do not appear in Mosaic law, then why isn't all work illegal? Jesus defends His disciples' actions, at first, by pointing out their accusers' duplicity.

Of course, the Pharisees might be expected to ask, at this point, if Jesus believes he and his disciples are of the same pedigree as King David or the Temple Levites offering sacrifices. But before they can raise such a question, Jesus declares that something better than the Temple has arrived (Matt. 12:6) and that He is the Son of Man (Matt. 12:8, Mark 2:28, Luke 6:5). And by claiming that title from Daniel 7:13-14, Jesus is proclaiming that He is the prophesied redemptive figure of Israel's eschatology, with an authority greater than David.[33] Jesus' use of such a title and the authority it implies "must have been startling to those who heard it," perhaps not as staggering as when He invoked the same title to forgive sins (Matt 9:1-8).But He is proclaiming Himself "Lord of the Sabbath" (Matt 12:8, Mark 2:28, Luke 6:5).[34] Jesus is clearly challenging the Pharisaical legalistic traditions around the day of rest and asserting Himself as the overseer of the Sabbath as its true master.

Mark's account of this episode uniquely records Jesus refocusing the Sabbath command with a clear declaration. "Then he said to them, 'The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath'" (Mark 2:27). Rather than disavowing the fourth commandment or doing away with the

[33] John Piper, "Why Is Jesus Called 'Son of Man'?," *Desiring God*, last modified April 4, 2008, accessed May 12, 2022, https://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/why-is-jesus-called-son-of-man.
[34] https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/essay/jesus-christ-son-man/

Sabbath ordinance altogether, Jesus affirms the sacredness of it and restores it to its true intent. Jesus refuses to agree with the Pharisees that eating grain in a field is a violation of the Sabbath, offering instead a more biblical understanding of what it means to keep the day holy. By declaring the Sabbath made for man, Jesus ties it back to creation as something God made, as well as to liberation from slavery as a mode of rest. The Sabbath is a day of rest for the benefit of human beings, which is why Jesus has no problem healing sick people on the Sabbath or allowing hungry people to eat. It is the Pharisees, he counters, who misconstrue the sacredness of the commandment by ignoring the people to whom it was given as a day of rest.[35]

Jesus even offers himself as a place of rest in Matthew 11: 28-30, a passage which appears right before Jesus declares himself Lord of the Sabbath: "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest...for your souls." God sees His people, as they were in Egypt, burdened and "heavy-laden," but this time the slave-masters are those who claim to speak for God, the teachers of Israel. The weight of keeping all the Law has become burdensome; even the fourth commandment, to rest, has become difficult and a load to carry rather than a relief. But Jesus has come to fulfill the purpose of the Sabbath in its deepest, most spiritual sense. The Apostle Paul echoes this truth by labeling the Sabbath a shadow of the reality that has come to us in Christ (Col. 2:16-17). The shadow of physical weekly rest symbolizes the reality of a deeper spiritual rest that is accomplished by Jesus on our behalf.

Hebrews 4 tells Christians that there is a "Sabbath rest for the people of God" (Heb. 4:9) who can rest from their work just as God did from His (Heb. 4:10). By entering God's rest, Christians cease their activity of trying to attain righteousness for themselves and, instead, take on the yoke and rest of Jesus, the Lord of Sabbath and, therefore, the Lord of rest. The

[35] "The Sabbath," *The Next Faithful Step* (Fuller Seminary, 2022), last modified 2022, accessed April 12, 2022, https://www.fuller.edu/next-faithful-step/resources/sabbath/.

commandment does not change but rather takes on a new dimension. The Sabbath is still intended as a day to rest and remember, a day set apart for a people set apart. Only now, in Christ, Christians can rest because of salvation found in Jesus and remember what He accomplished in His life, death and resurrection. Additionally, the Sabbath day can remain a day set apart for a new covenantal people group who have been set apart, purchased by the blood of Christ (Gal 3:13-15).

The new covenant in Christ is the basis for some to argue that keeping a weekly Sabbath is no longer required. Those who argue against the continuation of honoring the Sabbath day generally do not see Jesus' own observance of the Sabbath as evidence for its perpetuation as a spiritual practice for Christians today.[36] Even Paul's words in Colossians 2 can be construed to do away with all Sabbath-keeping.

However, this appears to be an oversimplification of the Sabbath practice, which is certainly one day set apart to rest and remember, as a distinct part of a God-focused week and approach to life. The Sabbath is not just a ritual or ceremonial law that has been undone in the new covenant. Its prominence throughout the Old Testament, its roots in the creation narrative and its emblematic role in the covenant between God and His people and their redemption and liberation, serve as reminders that the Sabbath is an enduring principle.

John Calvin, in his *Institutes*, argued for the continued importance of the Sabbath as a day of rest and worship which enables a proper perception of God's work throughout the week.[37] As the Reformed tradition spread, however, a stricter Sabbath observance, known as Sabbatarianism, also emerged. The Church of Scotland, with its Reformed Presbyterian heritage,

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[36] Justin Taylor, "Is the Sabbath Still Required for Christians?," *The Gospel Coalition*, last modified October 14, 2010, accessed May 12, 2022, https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/justin-taylor/schreiner-qa-is-the-sabbath-still-required-for-christians/.
[37] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1962), 251-252.

was made famous on the global stage for its Sabbath observance when an Olympic athlete named Eric Liddell declined to run a race in the 1924 Summer Games because the event fell on a Sunday. This sort of devotion to a particular day and way of cessation from all activity is continued today in certain denominations. It is also somewhat off-putting to some Christian pastors who see in it the sort of Pharisaical legalism which led Jesus to declare that the Sabbath was made for man, not vice versa.

Karl Barth is another theologian who contended for the importance of Sabbath as a continued practice for Christians, and therefore pastors. Barth views the Sabbath as "a continually recurring interruption" to the work of ministry which is a reminder that time on Earth is too limited to be focused solely on temporal matters but must instead be devoted to pursuing the things of God.[38] Because time to work is limited by a once-a-week day of rest, a Christian must trust God to continually work out His plan for the world. As pastors we are called to participate and play a small part in this work, but our contribution is, necessarily, limited.

The Sabbath can be preached and practiced as a spiritual discipline and in so doing it continues to enable God's people to rest as God did and to remember what God has done. Pastors who keep a Sabbath are practicing placing trust in Jesus. By keeping the Sabbath, they recognize His work in their personal lives and the life of the church. Setting one day aside to rest and remember rightly orders the rest of a pastor's week and his/her understanding of how God works in the lives of His people. Pastors who live within a rhythm of work and rest and practice a Sabbath can "set their hopes on something far greater than their work."[39]

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[38] Karl Barth and J. Marks, *Karl Barth Church Dogmatics*, ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance, trans. A. T. McKay et al. (New York: T & T Clark International, 2004), 47-72.
[39] Luisa J. Gallagher, "A Theology of Rest: Sabbath Principles for Ministry," *Christian Education Journal: Research on Educational Ministry* 16, no. 1 (2019): 134-149, 142.

Luisa Gallagher suggests that one of the most necessary tools for pastors today is a right theology of rest and that it is not enough to simply know about rest but also to embody how to rest. [40] As the research from chapter one demonstrated, nearly half of the respondents who did not practice a weekly Sabbath indicated that they had never been taught how to do so. This is the intent of the project focus of this thesis: to help teach pastors not just about the Sabbath but also how to practice a Sabbath. The paradigm of a weekly day off to rest and remember will be the biblical and theological foundation of this project. The environment in and through which to teach pastors the importance of a Sabbath will be the setting of the wilderness, where God often called and communed with His people.

Rest and Remember in the Wilderness

God instituted the Sabbath commandment in His creation; He drew His people into a weekly Sabbath in their wilderness journey; He gave the Sabbath commandment on a mountain. The people of God often rest in the desolate places of the wilderness, and it is there where they remember who God has called them to be. God shapes and apprentices His people through wilderness experiences.

Throughout the Gospels, Jesus maintains a rhythm of work and Sabbath rest, intentionally taking time to stop teaching and healing in order to rest and remember. He withdrew from the crowds to spend time by the sea in Mark 3:7; and he would go to desolate, wilderness places to pray (Mark 1:35, Luke 5:16), sometimes spending all night there (Matt. 14:23, Mark 6:46, Luke 6:12, John 6:16). The desolate wilderness places in theses passages are usually denoted by the Greek word, ἔρημον, implying withdrawal from one's typical setting to

[40] Gallagher, "A Theology of Rest: Sabbath Principles for Ministry," 134-149, 147.

go somewhere different. In this way, the wilderness as a particular place is similar to the Sabbath day as a particular time, set apart and unique.

There was always someone else for Jesus to heal or another crowd to teach. Yet, even with all this opportunity and need, Jesus sought time to rest. In Mark 6:31, when His disciples were so busy they could not even find time to eat, Jesus' response is enlightening. He invites the disciples to come with Him, just their small party, to a desolate place to rest, just like Jesus often did by himself according to Luke 5:16. What Jesus is doing, then, is inviting the disciples to experience the type of rest that was part of His natural rhythm and learn from him. Jesus clearly rested from His work, and it is evident that one of His favorite places to do so was in the wilderness, often on mountains.

Terence Donaldson, in his study of mountain terrain in Matthew, notices that there are six topographical markers which drive the narrative throughout the Gospel. Jesus is tempted on a mountain (Matt. 4:1-11), preaches the eponymous sermon on the mount (Matt. 5-7), feeds the five thousand in a "desolate place" (Matt. 14:13-21), is transfigured on top of a mountain (Matt 17:1-13), forecasts eschatological tribulation on the Mount of Olives (Matt. 24:3-14), where he also gives the great commission (Matt 28:16-20). This mountain motif throughout Matthew, Donaldson argues, is an echo of God's interaction with His people in the wilderness and on mountains after their exodus from Egypt, from Mount Sinai to the Promised Land.[41]

Jesus modeled the Sabbath for His disciples by choosing to cease ministering and rest. Whether or not He practiced the Sabbath day explicitly on the Jewish Sabbath is not clear. In fact, quite the contrary, it appears that He chose to do much of His work on the Jewish Sabbath. However, the Sabbath rest that Jesus practiced throughout His life and ministry is a clear

[41] Terence Donaldson, *Jesus on the Mountain a Study in Matthew* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 1987), 193-202.

demonstration of the rhythm of work and rest that pastors should embody. Jesus' rhythm of work and rest is an absolutely necessary reminder for pastors that "the right starting place for ministering to others is rest, not busyness."[42]

Another principle of Sabbath-keeping that Jesus modeled for his disciples was remembering. By practicing Sabbath we remember the God of the Universe, whom we serve, and we remember our freedom in Christ. These are fundamental truths of ministry and "because of its lack of distractions, the wilderness was a favorite place for Jesus to forge remembrance."[43] This is certainly in accordance with the Old Testament pattern of God's experiential education of His people in the wilderness. In fact, "Jesus often arranged for his disciples to experience" time in nature in order to grow their faith, most notably when they were in a raging storm in a small boat and He was fast asleep (Mark 4:37-41).[44]

Jesus sought out solitude in the wilderness, spent time with God in prayer on mountain peaks, and took His disciples into nature to teach them the work of ministry. For these reasons the wilderness, and specifically the Rocky Mountains of Colorado, would be an excellent training ground for a pastoral cohort to learn and experience the biblical and theological underpinnings of practicing a weekly Sabbath. Author and essayist Barbara Kingsolver writes, "People need wild places...we need to experience a landscape that is timeless, whose agenda moves at the pace of speciation and glaciers."[45]

The wilderness necessitates a reorientation of one's agenda and a reframing of physical, emotional, and even temporal boundaries. Throughout the Bible, "Mountain and desert territory connects people symbolically, if not literally, to places of ascent…and provokes the

[42] Ashley Denton, *Christian Outdoor Leadership* (Fort Collins: Smooth Stone Publishing, 2011), 70.
[43] Denton, *Christian Outdoor Leadership*, 73.
[44] Denton, *Christian Outdoor Leadership*, 46.
[45] Barbara Kingsolver, *Small Wonder* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2002), 40.

identification and reordering of boundaries."[46] This is also what a weekly Sabbath can do in the life of a pastor. This thesis-project will take a cohort of pastors into a desolate place to ascend mountains, spend time with God and with other ministers, to teach the biblical and theological principles of the Sabbath to pastors and encourage them to keep a Sabbath in the weekly lives.

[46] Belden C. Lane, *Solace of Fierce Landscapes Exploring Desert and Mountain Spirituality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 37.

CHAPTER THREE

LITERATURE REVIEW

Chapter One of this thesis-project explored the issue of pastoral burnout and the need for pastors to practice a weekly Sabbath not only as a remedy to burnout but as a day of rest and remembrance. Chapter Two then examined the biblical basis for this Sabbath practice, that is, one day each week specifically set aside for the people of God to rest and remember who He is and what He has done. Chapter Three will now explore select resources on Sabbath Rest which may be used to help pastoral leaders understand and apply this practice, which is the goal of the thesis project itself.

An internet search for Sabbath resources yields a myriad of results from articles to books to church doctrinal statements. For this thesis-project, however, I have selected six books which provide biblical perspective, unique insights and healthy prescriptions for how Sabbath could be practiced. Each of them can be used by the pastors participating in this thesis-project to develop their own theology and practice of Sabbath rest. The books chosen are *The Sabbath* by Abraham Heschel,[1] *Subversive Sabbath* by A.J. Swoboda,[2] *The Rest of God: Restoring Your Soul by Restoring Sabbath* by Mark Buchanan,[3] Curtis Zackery's *Soul Rest: Reclaim Your Life. Return to Sabbath.*,[4] *Keeping the Sabbath Wholly* by Marva J. Dawn,[5] and finally *24/6* by Matthew Sleeth, M.D.[6]

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[1] Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Sabbath* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1951).
[2] A. J. Swoboda, *Subversive Sabbath* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2018).
[3] Mark Buchanan, *The Rest of God: Restoring Your Soul by Restoring the Sabbath* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 2006).
[4] Curtis Zackery, *Soul Rest: Reclaim Your Life: Return to Sabbath* (Bellingham: Kirkdale Press, 2018).
[5] Marva Dawn, *Keeping the Sabbath Wholly* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1989).
[6] Matthew Sleeth, *24/6* (Carol Stream: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2012).

The Sabbath: A Jewish Perspective

Rabbi Abraham Heschel's short book, *The Sabbath*, is one of the most-quoted books on the Sabbath in modern literature. Its impact and influence are due in no small part to the highly poetic and reverential style with which Heschel characterizes and describes the Jewish practice of Sabbath-keeping. Heschel begins by constructing a dichotomy of space and time, wherein space is the realm of the temporal, material, and earthly, while time exists as the territory of God, stretching backward and forward into eternity.[7] This, at times, strikes the reader as a sort of Gnostic worldview, relegating space to the ordinary and elevating time to the holy. In fact, early critics of Heschel's work, published in 1951, felt that he was denigrating the newly reconstituted nation of Israel of 1948.[8]

However, Heschel never goes so far as to say the temporal and earthly things of space are useless or unnecessary. The problem is that modern civilization is obsessed with conquering or subduing space, namely through production, progress, and acquisition. Heschel views mankind as straining under the toil of modernity, particularly technological advancement, and notes that the obsession with space is due, in large part, to lacking awareness of, and rootedness in, time.

But Sabbath addresses this fundamental need of the human soul—to be rooted in God's time. Heschel posits that "Judaism is a religion of time aiming at the sanctification of time."[9] In fact, Heschel notes, the Hebrew word for holy, *qadosh,* is first used in the Bible to define the Sabbath.[10] Likewise, A.J. Swoboda points out that the Sabbath day is the only thing God decrees to be holy in the creation narrative.[11] After each day of creation, God describes what He has

[7] Heschel, *The Sabbath,* 45.
[8] Heschel, *The Sabbath,* xii.
[9] Heschel, *The Sabbath,* 8.
[10] Heschel, *The Sabbath,* 9.
[11] Swoboda, *Subversive Sabbath,* 12.

made as good, but after completing His work, He sanctifies the day itself, making the Sabbath, a particular point in time, holy.[12] It is for this reason, because God Himself declares the Sabbath as set apart, that He commands humans to join in keeping the Sabbath holy.

Heschel goes on to use two primary metaphors for describing the Sabbath, the first being a royal palace in time, "the royal day."[13] The Sabbath is a reminder that human beings exist in two worlds, "this world and the world to come," and by spiritual attentiveness to practicing an intentional day of rest, the people of God are preparing themselves for their eschatological future, building the palace brick by brick.[14] Heschel even goes so far as to assert that unless a person can enjoy the Sabbath, they can have no true understanding and appreciation for eternity: "one will be unable to enjoy the taste of eternity in the world to come."[15]

The second metaphor Heschel uses to describe the Sabbath, in keeping with the motif of royalty, is a bride and queen, the author even likening the celebration of the Sabbath day to a wedding.[16] He is explicit in pointing out that he is not personifying the Sabbath as a bride or queen but rather trying to describe its substance. It is holy, because God has made it so, and humankind's invitation to celebrate it is not a robotic technique for fulfilling a commandment but is instead a devoted task of preparation and practice.[17] Similarly, Swoboda elaborates on Heschel's illustration, suggesting that just as a wedding requires preparation, so too does practicing the Sabbath, because we must prepare to rest.[18]

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[12] Heschel, *The Sabbath,* 75.
[13] Heschel, *The Sabbath,* 17.
[14] Heschel, *The Sabbath,* 19.
[15] Heschel, *The Sabbath,* 74.
[16] Heschel, *The Sabbath,* 59.
[17] Heschel, *The Sabbath,* 60.
[18] Swoboda, *Subversive Sabbath,* 85.

The Sabbath is a day of rest. Rest, though, is not simply relaxation or recovering strength to become a more efficient worker.[19] Practicing Sabbath rest can and will lead to benefits for a person, but the Sabbath was not given to man to unlock potential or achieve more. Rest, in a true sense, is part of practicing Sabbath because it helps frame a paradigm for life that gives greater dignity to human value than simply what a person can produce or accomplish.[20] Rest as a momentary interlude, instead of a habitual practice, or rest purely for the sake of higher output, is not Sabbath rest.

The Sabbath is also a day of sanctified time for the people of God to remember. Because time stretches backward, the Jewish people remember their exodus from Egypt and the giving of the law at Sinai. Because time also extends to the future, Sabbath also allows God's people to remember their Messianic hope.[21] Heschel, a Rabbi, obviously does not point to Jesus the Christ as the Messiah of Judaism. Yet, his point is striking, and the reference to the Sabbath as a bride reflects the theological truth of the Church as the bride of Jesus. Christian men and women can truly rest because we remember that God has rescued and redeemed His people through His son's death and resurrection. The Sabbath is a day for Christians to remember who Jesus is and what He has done.

For pastors practicing the Sabbath, Heschel's book offers significant insights. Heschel, in describing the burnout of 20th century life in the 1950s taps into an issue that many men and women in ministry experience today. Practicing the Sabbath is key, Heschel argues, because it is a harbor for the reclamation of a person's "authentic state" regardless of their work environment, career success, or family difficulties.[22] While often loquacious, *The Sabbath* is a key work of

[19] Heschel, *The Sabbath,* 14.
[20] Heschel, *The Sabbath,* 29.
[21] Heschel, *The Sabbath,* 68.
[22] Heschel, *The Sabbath,* 30.

literature for anyone seeking to better understand the rich tradition of keeping the Sabbath holy. Christian readers looking for a Jewish perspective on the topic find a helpful and concise resource in Heschel's book.

Sabbath For…

Drawing clear influence from Heschel's work, A.J. Swoboda's book *Subversive Sabbath*, broadens the discussion of the Sabbath and is easily one of the most expansive books on the subject. The author's work is broad and its application far-reaching, demonstrating how the Sabbath is impactful for individuals and communities alike. *Subversive Sabbath* is both comprehensive and accessible for pastors seeking to learn about the Sabbath.

As the title suggests, to practice the Sabbath can be considered subversive, not necessarily in a social or cultural sense (although that has certainly been the case throughout world history, especially for Jewish communities and Sabbatarian Christians) but because as a weekly, intentional day of rest the "Sabbath goes against the very structure and system of the world we have constructed."[23] Because the organization of the world and most of our lives leads to general busyness and makes practicing the Sabbath a challenge, Swoboda argues that it is a gift, given by God, for personal benefit, for others, for creation, and for worship.

The author grounds his examination of the Sabbath on its historical and theological foundations and begins his book by studying how the Sabbath is "for us," meaning that it is given by God to mankind as a gift. It is not a practice to be done for God but is a time to spend with Him.[24] Author Skye Jethani, in his book *With*, discusses how Christians can fall into the trap of doing things in the name of God or even for Him while losing sight of God's desire to be

[23] Swoboda, *Subversive Sabbath,* xi.
[24] Swoboda, *Subversive Sabbath,* 5.

with us.[25] Sabbath is a reorientation of life with God because it is, according to Swoboda, "an all-encompassing turning toward the Creator God that changes everything about our lives."[26]

Swoboda, writing nearly 70 years later, joins Heschel in outlining the dangerous encroachment of technology and work into the realm of Sabbath; he cautions against the invasion of worry about work, often due to devices in our home and pockets, into the day of rest.[27] However, Swoboda does not create the same dichotomy as Heschel between sacred and secular; instead he demonstrates that Jesus, as Lord of the Sabbath, is the true restorer of human life in work, play, and rest and that the Sabbath day itself is part of a rhythm of rest that allows Jesus' rest to permeate all of life.[28] *Subversive Sabbath* emphasizes that Sabbath is not an escape from work and that work itself is not part of the fall and, therefore, will be part of eternity.[29]

By positioning the Sabbath as first for the human being, Swoboda offers various ways to celebrate and practice the Sabbath, not out of strict adherence to a ritual law or simply for personal benefit, but rather as an opportunity to be with and to "be more faithful to Jesus the Lord of Sabbath."[30] He cites Marva Dawn's seminal work on the topic and suggests that each Sabbath is an opportunity to stop working, to rest, to play and feast and, in so doing, "delighting in God."[31] Swoboda goes on to discuss various Sabbath activities that have worked for him, how he balances ministry and the practice of Sabbath. He is, though, adamant about the point that Sabbath practice is not about specific activities to be accomplished on the day of rest but more about the spiritual posture of a person toward God.[32]

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[25] Skye Jethani, *With: Reimagining the Way You Relate to God* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2011).
[26] Swoboda, *Subversive Sabbath,* 9.
[27] Swoboda, *Subversive Sabbath,* 18.
[28] Swoboda, *Subversive Sabbath,* 17.
[29] Swoboda, *Subversive Sabbath,* 27.
[30] Swoboda, *Subversive Sabbath,* 40.
[31] Swoboda, *Subversive Sabbath,* 21.
[32] Swoboda, *Subversive Sabbath,* 41.

The final section of Swoboda's Sabbath "For Us" discussion centers on personal health and well-being. Sabbath is rest for the soul, certainly, and it also offers the occasion for mental and physical rest as well. Swoboda states that Sabbath can change our minds as well as our bodies because it not only offers rest but commands and even sanctifies it. Dr. Matthew Sleeth echoes this idea, stating that the Sabbath is a day to take a "God-ordained nap."[33] We need naps and rest, Swoboda says, because we are weary and burdened people struggling, like Atlas in Greek mythology, trying to carry the weight of our world on our own shoulders. Sabbath is the day when we remember that the Lord of the Sabbath says in Matthew 11:28, "I will give you rest."[34]

Swoboda moves his discussion to how the individual practice of Sabbath also benefits others. For pastors and church leaders, Swoboda asks, poignantly, what it would look like if the church was the best place for people to learn and practice rest.[35] Churches can be communities of rest in a weary world. If they are communities that foster busyness and even produce burnout, they will damage relationships rather than create godly ones.

Swoboda compares two types of people groups: those involved in "peg" relationships and "ethical" communities.[36] Peg communities are interchangeable groups which depend on a variety of temporary factors to connect people, such as interests or location (i.e. book clubs, sports teams). Ethical communities, on the other hand, are meant to be long-term commitments, built on something deeper, more lasting and meaningful. Churches, for example, should be ethical communities, meant to worship God and help people connect with him and others in the Name of Christ. But more and more, they feel like mere peg communities, adding stress to life without

[33] Sleeth, *24/6*, 84.
[34] Swoboda, *Subversive Sabbath,* 60.
[35] Swoboda, *Subversive Sabbath,* 72.
[36] Swoboda, *Subversive Sabbath,* 68.

relief. The church, then, is the place where Sabbath should be championed, taught, and observed. If pastors don't keep the Sabbath holy, who will?

A major area in which pastors can see the Sabbath benefitting others is not only in their congregations, but their marriage and family as well. Swoboda calls the Sabbath a "gift to marriage" and suggests that it was assumed in the Old Testament that family units would practice Sabbath together.[37] By drawing the family unit inward and upward together, Sabbath can be the "centerpiece" of a life, a family, and a church that reflects God's heart for His people.[38]

Swoboda's third section looks at the ramifications of the Sabbath "For Creation," and how an intentional day of rest and remembrance can shape a broader theology of creation and benefit the created world. For the purpose of this thesis-project, this exploration of Sabbath rest and the physical world is helpful insofar as it helps to teach pastors to practice a weekly Sabbath; we will withdraw to the mountains to rest and learn together. Swoboda studies the biblical jubilee, a Sabbath for the land, as a reminder that human beings are not the creators or owners of any place on earth, but rather tenants and caretakers of the land "God has placed us in."[39]

Part of a healthy Sabbath practice can be intentional time in the natural world. Built into the cadence of life, the Sabbath can be a standard interval during which a person can admire and appreciate the work of God in His creation.[40] This practice of walks in nature with a loved one or prayerful hikes with friends on the Sabbath is not simply for the enjoyment of the natural world. While there is something inherently good and healthy about enjoying what God has made, by resting from work and engaging in other life-giving activities, a person can connect with the

[37] Swoboda, *Subversive Sabbath,* 78.
[38] Swoboda, *Subversive Sabbath,* 84.
[39] Swoboda, *Subversive Sabbath,* 135.
[40] Swoboda, *Subversive Sabbath,* 139.

other major outlet of Sabbath – remembering what God has done. For Christians, the Sabbath day and time in nature reminds us of God's original plan for His creation and helps us remember that what we enjoy on earth is merely "an appetizer for the fulfillment of Christ's work" in our lives, in creation, and in the universe.[41] Marva Dawn calls it a "foretaste" of eternal life.[42]

Building on this point, Swoboda's final section discussing the Sabbath examines how the Sabbath can and should lead to worship. The Sabbath is, as N.T. Wright states, a "signpost" pointing toward God's promised future in Christ that is present and still to come.[43] In order to be a signpost, Swoboda urges his readers to avoid two extremes when it comes to the practice of Sabbath. The first extreme is to legalize the Sabbath command to the point of manufacturing a new ordinance and universalizing a day in which no work must occur.[44] The truth is that the Sabbath command, given to the Israelites, is one of the 10 commandments, and breaking the Sabbath command was punishable by death. However, the Sabbath is a signpost that points to Jesus as the Lord of the Sabbath, who eschews religious rigidity for true rest in Him.

The other extreme is to over spiritualize the practice of Sabbath, making it an esoteric and philosophical ideal.[45] Knowing that Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath, and that true rest is found only in Christ, followers of Jesus (pastors included) sometimes think they can forego a day of actual rest, excusing themselves from the biblical command because it has been fulfilled in Christ. Ironically, Swoboda notes, no pastor extends this hermeneutic to any of the other commandments![46] We know that the Law was ultimately fulfilled in Christ and yet we still refrain from creating idols, murdering others, and committing adultery. We find ultimate rest in

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[41] Swoboda, *Subversive Sabbath,* 130.
[42] Dawn, *Keeping the Sabbath Holy*, 62.
[43] N. T. Wright, *Simply Jesus: A New Version of Who He Was, What He Did, Why It Matters* (New York: HarperOne, 2011), 137.
[44] Swoboda, *Subversive Sabbath,* 198.
[45] Swoboda, *Subversive Sabbath,* 199
[46] Swoboda, *Subversive Sabbath,* 200.

the work of Christ, and it is still important to take one actual day each week to rest.[47] Practicing the Sabbath is both planting that signpost in one's life each week and being reminded of its presence.

Sabbath: Restore the Soul

The Rest of God by Mark Buchanan focuses on how to take an actual day to rest and how to make sure that day is not merely a day off but a day of spiritual significance. His book identifies the fundamentals of the Sabbath day and pairs it with a "Sabbath Liturgy," offering a devotional aspect for someone intending to practice the Sabbath. Buchanan highlights many aspects of the Sabbath but three in particular stand out in the context of this thesis-project: rest, recreation, and restoration.

To Buchanan, the Sabbath is both a "day and an attitude," a specific time each week and a disposition of the heart that is founded on the rest of God. He even goes so far as to say that without a heart rightly related to God, a person will never actually enter into the rest of the Sabbath.[48] Sabbath rest is a rest of mind and body, but also soul, because it is precipitated by trust and reliance on God, the giver of true rest. Because followers of Christ are spiritually rooted and hold to a conviction that God is sovereign and good, participants in a day of Sabbath rest can put their trust in Him to do what they cannot.[49]

This is not a far-flung hope that God will miraculously accomplish things at work or in the church outside of human activity. Instead, it is a deep trust in God's sovereignty that allows the people of God to relinquish the need for control or power and find identity in God Himself.[50]

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[47] Swoboda, *Subversive Sabbath,* 200.
[48] Buchanan, *The Rest of God,* 4.
[49] Buchanan, *The Rest of God,* 63.
[50] Buchanan, *The Rest of God,* 62.

For pastors, the pressure of ministry can be overwhelming because the ministry itself is such a strong connection point to the work of God. True Sabbath rest, though, allows a pastor to "relax without guilt" because he knows that he is not God.[51] This soul-shaping aspect of Sabbath-keeping is integral to a high view of God and an appropriate view of human work, even ministry.

Buchanan, surely influenced by Heschel, describes the Sabbath as "time sanctified" to God and for humans.[52] In order to keep the Sabbath holy, Buchanan offers insight into how to spend time on the Sabbath each week, beyond resting from work. One specific way to practice Sabbath-keeping is to stop doing things for work and start doing things for recreation. Buchanan calls this the "Golden Rule" of Sabbath – to cease doing what is necessary and do something life-giving or "re-creating" for the soul.[53] Tim Keller refers to this as "avocational time" on the Sabbath, doing something meaningful that is not part of a daily routine or work schedule.[54]

Interestingly, just as Swoboda did, Buchanan describes the Sabbath, especially the playful, recreational aspect of Sabbath, as "subversive" to a culture of 24/7 work.[55] Play on the Sabbath, in a truly re-creative way, is not merely leisure time or mindless activity that one lacks time for during the work week. Buchanan doesn't specifically define what is or what is not Sabbath play because what might be vocational for one person is avocational to another. Tilden Edwards, though, offers useful boundaries for what restful play may look like, suggesting that highly competitive, dangerous or taxing activities are "likely to hide authentic, restful, God-revealing play" because they often invoke worry, fear, or a degree of weighty seriousness.[56]

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[51] Buchanan, *The Rest of God,* 51.
[52] Buchanan, *The Rest of God,* 35.
[53] Buchanan, *The Rest of God,* 128-129.
[54] Timothy Keller, "Redeemer Report," Six Ways to Practice Sabbath, March 2018, https://www.redeemer.com/redeemer-report/article/six_ways_to_practice_sabbath.
[55] Buchanan, *The Rest of God,* 140.
[56] Tilden Edwards, *Sabbath Time* (Nashville: Upper Room Books, 1992), 65.

Still, there are trademarks to Sabbath play that make it re-creative and restorative to the soul, bringing life rather than extending drudgery. Sabbath play is not merely leisure activities. In fact, according to Buchanan, "Leisure is what Sabbath becomes when we no longer know how to sanctify time." Instead of being present in a moment, leisure activities tend to occupy time by vacating it.[57] Hours spent browsing the internet, playing a videogame, or watching 24-hour news on the Sabbath may not be work but it is also, likely, not Sabbath play. True, healthy, re-creative play hints at the world beyond this one, offering insight into life in the Kingdom of Heaven.[58]

Sabbath offers rest and a time for recreation, and in so doing becomes a soul-restoring day of the week. "Jesus' favorite day to heal and restore was the Sabbath," angering the Pharisees who demanded legalistic observance, and establishing Himself as the Lord of the Sabbath.[59] When Jesus declares in Mark 2:27, "Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath," He is not forsaking the commandment to keep the Sabbath holy, but illuminating it. Buchanan articulates that Sabbath is a gift, given by God, for people to be replenished and restored.[60] This is true of a mental state, as a day of rest is good for the stressed mind. It's also necessary for the body, as a day of recreation can prolong life and contribute to greater feelings of satisfaction and enjoyment. Fundamentally, though, the Sabbath restores a person to a humble state of being, dependent on God, and aware of what He has done. Sabbath restores the factory-settings on the hard-drive of the human heart, soul, and mind.

Buchanan's book does an admirable job clearly stating the advantage of practicing the Sabbath. The author also offers an excellent definition of the Sabbath: "Imitating God so that we

[57] Buchanan, *The Rest of God,* 35.
[58] Buchanan, *The Rest of God,* 140.
[59] Buchanan, *The Rest of God,* 155.
[60] Buchanan, *The Rest of God,* 219.

stop trying to be God."[61] There are many reasons and purposes to practice an intentional weekly day of cessation and recreation. God Himself rested and in mimicking His practice of Sabbath, a pastor can also rest, find time to enjoy the world, and be restored to a fuller theological understanding that he or she is not God.

Sabbath: Rhythms of Life

Each of the authors thus far has described the Sabbath as a glimpse or example of the world to come, eternity with God in the Kingdom of Heaven. Curtis Zackery, in his book *Soul Rest*, affirms this and pronounces that "we practice the Sabbath to lean into the foretaste of life in His presence."[62] The author commences his discourse on the Sabbath by defining it and then shifts to how to practically exercise a Sabbath day. Zackery's book often speaks directly to those who are in ministry and offers suggestions to establish a rhythm of rest.

The author elaborates reasons for the Sabbath and, aiming at a pastoral audience, cites ministry burnout, weariness, and disillusionment as potential outcomes for life in ministry without rest.[63] Zackery suggests Psalm 46:10 as a key passage for a theology of rest, intimating that the Sabbath is a day to "Be still and know that I am God." Rest is the first and foremost task on the Sabbath and to keep the Sabbath holy, rest must be intentionally established as a vital part of life.[64] This is certainly true of a person's mental state as the benefits of healthy, regular sleep allow clearer and more effective thinking. The author even offers sleep as a healthy and life-giving activity, as part of a rhythm of physical care.[65] A Sabbath nap, something Swoboda also mentioned, could be one of the best ways to practice the stop and rest aspect of keeping the

[61] Buchanan, *The Rest of God,* 87.
[62] Zackery, *Soul Rest*, 47.
[63] Zackery, *Soul Rest*, 37.
[64] Zackery, *Soul Rest*, 77.
[65] Zackery, *Soul Rest*, 205.

Sabbath holy. By taking intentional unconscious time in the middle of the day, a pastor is foregoing work and the thought of ministry and becoming passive and open to the work of God in his life and the church.

A nap is an act of rest and remembrance because sleep typically only occurs when work is finished. Rest is the first key of Sabbath-practice. The second is remembering what God has done. The Sabbath is a day to cease from the labor of the previous six days, and to "remember the significant work that happened on the cross."[66] Work is about contribution or production, and in ministry a pastor feels that he or she is contributing to the work of God – a noble pursuit! Sabbath rest is an acknowledgement that the work has already been done and Christians, pastors as well, are invited to remember that truth.

This is why studying the Bible, not for ministry, but for edification and remembrance is a helpful aspect of Sabbath rhythm.[67] Keeping the Sabbath holy could include a time in Scripture without attempting to decide how to teach the passage or apply it to ministry. Time in the Psalms, the Gospels, or a book of the Bible (that won't be a part of a Bible study or sermon series) will help to develop "a deeper understanding of the work that is accomplished by Christ, which, in turn, produces rest" at a soul level.[68]

Zackery's book is puzzling in its structure because it begins with a study of the Sabbath but then shifts to a discussion of rhythms that seems to leave the Sabbath behind. Sabbath-keeping is assumed as the foundation for the rhythms and rest, but the author doesn't quite connect an intentional weekly day of Sabbath to those rhythms. In fact, in the final chapter, when discussing rhythms of life, Zackery separates the rhythm of Sabbath from other healthy, life-

[66] Zackery, *Soul Rest*, 47.
[67] Zackery, *Soul Rest*, 189.
[68] Zackery, *Soul Rest*, 190.

restoring rhythm activities such as time in nature, worship, recreation, meditation, and more. The author is clear that all the principles he discusses as rhythmic can be threaded throughout the Sabbath but by separating them from it, rather than having those rhythms be Sabbath activities, it seems to suggest the Sabbath as another activity rather than the day for some of those intentional activities.

This raises a necessary question – can a life filled with rhythms of rest practiced throughout the week be aggregated as a substitute for the Sabbath? Instead of a single day each week devoted to rest and remembrance, does a daily quiet time or evening walk honor the spirit of the Sabbath and keep it holy? Zackery appears to believe this to be true, suggesting "there is nothing inherently spiritual about taking a day to rest."[69] This is in direct contrast to the other authors in this chapter and even with the first half of Zackery's own book. This is not to say that he sees no value in the Sabbath day, but he concludes his book with a utilitarian perspective.

Zackery clearly argues that only God can provide true rest for the soul and that the Sabbath day or healthy rhythms in life can only aid in bringing a person to a greater awareness of their need for God.[70] That is certainly true of some of the rhythms which the author elaborates upon, such as time outdoors, listening to music, or reading. The Sabbath, though, was a commanded day of rest for the people of God which Jesus did not abolish but rather fulfilled. Therefore, it does exist, at least on some level, on a higher plane and exerts a greater influence on a pastor's spiritual life than other beneficial rhythms that were not ordained by God.

Pastor John Ortberg writes about the rhythms that Jesus built into his life and ministry and, consequently, instilling those rhythms into the lives of his followers. Ortberg, not naming the Sabbath but providing a good definition of its significance, says that Jesus "slowed his

[69] Zackery, *Soul Rest*, 211.
[70] Zackery, *Soul Rest*, 211.

followers down so that their souls would not become fatigued."[71] Jesus as Lord of the Sabbath does not tell His followers to shun the Sabbath, He gives them the truest meaning of it.

Zackery contends, "Stopping intentionally to practice a Sabbath day tangibly helps us apply the principles" of rhythm and rest.[72] The truth of the Sabbath, though, is that rest is not a principle to be applied but part of the framework for how life is to be lived. God gives the Sabbath as a gift, Jesus is the Lord of the Sabbath, and a person can rest in that truth and be reminded of it by being purposeful in keeping it set apart. This primary critique aside, Zackery's book is still a valuable resource that proposes practical life rhythms that are useful for helping pastors understand what behaviors they may want to undertake and even make characteristic of their Sabbath day.

Keep the Sabbath Wholly

On the topic of Sabbath, other than Rabbi Heschel, no other author or book is as cited or held in such high esteem as *Keeping the Sabbath Wholly* by Marva J. Dawn. The wordplay in the title is playful but also salient in that it immediately makes the reader aware of the author's intention. Dawn clearly sets up four aspects of Sabbath practice that help facilitate a more holistic approach to understanding and keeping the Sabbath day. Dawn concurs with Zackery's central focus on rhythm, seeing the Sabbath not as a "legalistic duty" but a part of a life of freedom where one in every seven days is set apart as holy.[73] The four facets of practicing the Sabbath, according to Dawn, are ceasing, resting, embracing, and feasting. For the purpose of this thesis-project, greater attention will be given to the first two characteristics: ceasing and resting.

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[71] John Ortberg, *Soul Keeping: Caring for the Most Important Part of You* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 135.
[72] Zackery, *Soul Rest*, 210.
[73] Dawn, *Keeping the Sabbath Wholly*, xii.

First, to keep the Sabbath holy means to stop working, to cease from the toil of the week. Dawn takes the central idea of refraining from work a step further, though, suggesting that by ceasing from the work itself, a person is also ceasing the feeling, need, or desire to work, to produce, or to accomplish anything.[74] For pastors, refraining from checking email for 24 hours but stressing over how many will need to be addressed after Sabbath ends is not the intent of the Sabbath day. A true Sabbath can help overcome the need to solve every issue or be attentive to every request.

Dawn points out that the Israelites were not simply told to not work, but to cease their labor "in order to honor their covenant with God."[75] Not working on the Sabbath is not for the purpose of foregoing labor, but for the purposefulness of living life with God. The author, from the start, does an excellent job of shunning legalistic Sabbath practice, championing the freedom of the Gospel, and providing tangible ways to live out a Sabbath day. A clear example of this is the lighting of two candles at the start of the Sabbath, a Jewish tradition, to observe and remember that it is now Sabbath, that the day is holy because God has made it so, and to remember what God has done.[76] Wayne Muller, the author of another classic work on the Sabbath, highlights the practice of lighting candles, positing that by lighting candles, taking a few deep breaths, letting the mind go quiet, "the quality of the day begins to shift."[77]

A critical aspect of ceasing work, Dawn says, is to stop trying to be like God. The original sin in the Garden still pervades the human heart, perhaps even more so for pastors who want to rescue and redeem lost sheep. While pastors are in the position of a shepherd, their

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[74] Dawn, *Keeping the Sabbath Wholly*, 3.
[75] Dawn, *Keeping the Sabbath Wholly*, 6.
[76] Dawn, *Keeping the Sabbath Wholly*, 11.
[77] Wayne Muller, *Sabbath: Finding Rest, Renewal, and Delight in Our Busy Lives* (New York: Bantam Books, 1999), 21.

congregations are God's sheep, as is the pastor. Sabbath-keeping allows a person to remember this truth. By making the Sabbath the highlight of the week, not just a day off, by having time flow toward it and from it, a pastor can rest in the security of God's presence and allow it to permeate their life and ministry.[78]

A physical action at the onset of the Sabbath, a clear distinction between what came before and what comes after, is a useful method of ceasing work. There's nothing inherently sacred about lighting two candles or saying out loud, "Sabbath has started," or powering down a cell phone, or leaving a computer in a car. Nevertheless, in order to actually conclude six days of work and usher in the seventh day of rest, a habit or technique is advantageous as a memory device and a physical sign of keeping the Sabbath holy.

To cease from work on the Sabbath is to enter a day of rest. After all, the Hebrew word for Sabbath, *shabbat*, means "to rest." Under the umbrella of rest, Dawn identifies three areas in which the Sabbath offers rest: physical, emotional, and spiritual rest. Physical rest is, perhaps, most visible. The author suggests beginning the Sabbath in the evening, as the Jews have done for centuries, because one of the first actions of Sabbath is sleep.[79] Sabbath sleep is restful for the body and mind, and it initiates a day of rest with an intentional non-activity. Dawn would agree with the idea of a God-designed nap.

The author brings up a good contrast to the idea of avocational recreation on the Sabbath, specifically that refraining from even life-giving activity may be the best way to rest on a day set apart. If exercise is part of the healthy routine and rhythm of the other six days of life, the Sabbath is a good day to rest the body from swimming or running.[80] This is no prescription to do

[78] Dawn, *Keeping the Sabbath Wholly*, 34.
[79] Dawn, *Keeping the Sabbath Wholly*, 10.
[80] Dawn, *Keeping the Sabbath Wholly*, 67.

nothing on the Sabbath but to rest the body is a good reminder that Sabbath may not be the best day to mow a lawn or take on a grueling task in home repair. Rest for the body is critical to Sabbath-keeping.

Physical rest can assist emotional rest as the mind and body operate jointly. Emotional rest, contributing to greater mental health and satisfaction in life, is a vital reason for sleep. Not being connected to technology or the things of the workplace are ways to instill an emotional break from the difficulty of life and ministry. The practice of Sabbath is a day of resting in one's relationship with God and deepening that relationship which contributes to emotional healing.[81] Sabbath is an emotionally restorative experience because it allows for feelings, emotions, and experiences that lead to a more thorough enjoyment of the gifts of God in life.[82]

Sabbath is a gift from God and keeping the day holy allows a person to experience God's other gifts in life. The greatest result of Sabbath rest, though, is the awareness of the presence of God, regardless of other extenuating circumstances.[83] No matter what may be taking place at work, in the church, at school, or in the family, the Sabbath day is one of spiritual rest to spend time with a sovereign God who is intimately aware of and in control of all things.

Dawn continues to provide illustrations and examples of healthy practices including ways to incorporate a social element to Sabbath-keeping. For some and on certain occasions, a meal shared with friends or reconnecting with an old colleague are wonderful ways to rest. For other people, though, refraining from engaging in those relationships or social gatherings, even good and healthy ones, may be the truest form of rest on the Sabbath. An extremely extroverted pastor may need to abstain from constantly inviting new couples to dinner on the Sabbath day to rest

[81] Dawn, *Keeping the Sabbath Wholly*, 74.
[82] Dawn, *Keeping the Sabbath Wholly*, 77.
[83] Dawn, *Keeping the Sabbath Wholly*, 61.

and be present with the Lord and his own family. A more introverted person may see the Sabbath as a way to rest from draining conversations and relationships by pouring into the select few that are more satisfying and life-giving.

Dawn turns her attention to an aspect of Sabbath that she calls Embracing. This includes embracing one's identity in Christ, calling in life, Christian community, and Christ-like values. Most importantly, though, Sabbath-keeping is a call to embrace a lifestyle that is countercultural and even antithetical to the way of the world. It is embracing a worldview and a kind of life that is intentional and deliberate about living in response to God's grace through Jesus, which means that for the person keeping the Sabbath holy, life will look different.[84]

For pastors, this embrace of God's way of life is also an embrace of the call to ministry. In their book, *On Being a Pastor,* Derek Prime and Alistair Begg outline the weightiness of a pastoral call because a pastor's life is intended to be "an example for others to follow" and a reflection of God's righteousness and sanctification playing out in real time.[85] One of the clearest examples of a different lifestyle, one in pursuit of the things of God, to a world that is consumed with production and busyness is a life that embraces intentional rest.

Dawn's final characteristic of the Sabbath, Feasting, is summarized as the enjoyment of things in life that are either not as easy to appreciate during the work week or which Sabbath allows a planned time to engage with. She devotes an entire chapter to feasting on beauty, namely through the natural world, which offers an excellent opportunity to reflect on the character of God. Dawn offers a good word of caution that in enjoying the "larger temple of

[84] Dawn, *Keeping the Sabbath Wholly*, 104.
[85] Derek J. Prime and Alistair Begg, *On Being a Pastor Understanding Our Calling and Work* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2004), 40.

nature" as a way to practice the Sabbath, a person must resist any sort of temptation to worship creation over its Creator.[86]

This is a worthwhile caution for this thesis-project which will take a group of pastors out of their usual settings and contexts, going to the mountains to explore nature, connect with God, and learn about the Sabbath. Nature is not the only place that a person can learn to or practice the Sabbath. This erroneous belief ignores the fact that most of the world lives in large cities, often unable to find opportunities to spend time outside due to pollution, traffic, or other issues. Feasting on nature is a way to delight in what God has created on the day that is intended to mark the completion of creation, but it is not the only way.

Marva Dawn's book on Sabbath is a classic for a reason and does an excellent job exploring both the why and how of Sabbath-keeping. She emphasizes the importance, as Curtis Zackery did, of finding and implementing rhythms into daily life for the purpose of rest and connection with God. Dawn is clear that the rhythm of keeping the Sabbath is one day out of every seven.[87] By observing the Sabbath as one, whole, 24-hour period of time it sets both the day and the person apart from the rest of the week and the world. For six days, a human being is part of making, shaping, even transforming the world. For pastors, that work includes other human beings, eternal creatures whom God loves and cares for, and in whose lives God has placed the pastor to shepherd. On the Sabbath, by refraining from acting and participating in the world, a pastor can rest, while remembering and celebrating the "grandeur and mystery of creation," and more importantly, the Creator.[88]

[86] Dawn, *Keeping the Sabbath Wholly*, 177.
[87] Dawn, *Keeping the Sabbath Wholly*, 6.
[88] Dawn, *Keeping the Sabbath Wholly*, 204.

Sabbath: Doctor's Orders

With an easy-to-read approach and a medical perspective because of the author's profession, Matthew Sleeth's *24/6* gives both a high-level view of the theology of Sabbath practice as well as concrete and applicable details for how to practice a Sabbath day of rest. Sleeth joins a recent groundswell of medical and mental health professionals with an interest in the ancient practice of Sabbath-keeping.

A 2019 article by Barbara Baker Speedling published in the *Journal of Religion and Health* is exceptionally titled – *Celebrating Sabbath as a Holistic Health Practice: The Transformative Power of a Sanctuary in Time.* This sociological study included ten women who previously did not practice the Sabbath and who began to do so and presented the author with some insights across the board, namely that Sabbath-keeping "enhanced self-awareness, improved self-care, enriched relationships, developed spirituality, and positively affected the rest of a Sabbath-keeper's week."[89] This is a wonderful summary of how Sabbath can be transformative and affect mental health. The author, even in her title, directly quotes Rabbi Heschel and echoes his sentiment that the Sabbath is a sanctuary in the week, an anchor for a person in a chaotic world.

An expansive 2018 study by Duke Divinity School zeroes in on how Sabbath might affect clergy's physical, mental, and spiritual health. The authors of this study acknowledge that in studies of the public, setting a Sabbath day apart for "rest and spiritual rejuvenation, has been related to better mental health and less stress in cross-sectional studies."[90] The authors seek to observe Sabbath's effects on clergy specifically, noting the complication of pastors working on

[89] Barbara Baker Speedling, "Celebrating Sabbath as a Holistic Health Practice: The Transformative Power of a Sanctuary in Time," *Journal of Religion and Health* 58, no. 4 (October 2019): 1382-1400.
[90] Holly Hough et al., "Relationships between Sabbath Observance and Mental, Physical, and Spiritual Health in Clergy," *Pastoral Psychology* 68, no. 2 (August 2018): 171-193.

Sundays. Ministry is a profession that often lacks boundaries around time, spanning into nights and weekends. They surveyed over 1300 United Methodist clergy and in summarizing their findings, the authors observed that "Sabbath-keeping was significantly related to higher quality of life and spiritual well-being." This is good news! The truth that Sabbath is made for man is demonstrated by its positive benefits on those who practice it, pastors included.

Matthew Sleeth, an ER physician, joins in the chorus of those asserting the advantages of keeping the Sabbath holy. He is also quick, though, to stress that the Sabbath day is not just "part of a trendy self-help program" or a mini vacation in the middle of the week, but that it is "a part of heaven and a glimpse of God."[91] He agrees on this point with every author examined thus far, in affirming the Sabbath as more than time away from work or a day off. The doctor, a Christian but not a pastor, does an excellent job of educating his readers regarding how to practice the Sabbath. He notes the various days that Jews, Seventh-Day Adventists and others have observed the Sabbath and then asserts that any day will do to stop working and rest. The importance of the "Stop Day" is the stopping.[92]

Sleeth takes his readers on a brief theological overview of the Sabbath, observing the passages in Scripture in a biblically accurate way that is helpful for pastors but also not so wide-ranging as to be boring or an obstacle to easily understanding and implementing the Sabbath. Sleeth illustrates the importance of the Sabbath suggesting that no pastor would preach a sermon on the 10 commandments in which he proposes "we ditch these commandments" and yet pastoral theology around the fourth commandment often does just that.[93]

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[91] Sleeth, *24/6*, 119.
[92] Sleeth, *24/6*, 23.
[93] Sleeth, *24/6*, 41.

The author recognizes, as others have done before him, that the Law is fulfilled in Christ. This does not overthrow the Sabbath, though, rather Jesus fulfills it and restores it to its original intent.[94] Once again, this author and others, argues for the Sabbath to be given greater importance than an Old Testament law which has been surpassed by Jesus. Although Christians no longer live under the law and are not required to obey those pertaining to the Sabbath, its place in creation, its distinction as holy, and its importance to the people of God throughout Scripture point to its significance. While it may not be an ordinance of the church, such as baptism or communion, it still has a substantive spiritual value that pastors can and should lean into rather than away from.

Sleeth is less descriptive of Sabbath practices and habits than Marva Dawn but what he emphasizes most is the Sabbath as Stop Day. Stop doing and be still. He even suggests staying home on the Sabbath if the rest of one's work week is filled with constant moving or travel.[95] Sleeth, a proponent of the Sabbath nap, suggests that boredom is not just acceptable but even preferable to too much activity, even good activity, on the Sabbath because boredom is a level of intentional stillness that most people rush to avoid and cover over.[96] Boredom or stillness can actually lead to tranquility and is often when and where people encounter God.

Stillness is Sleeth's favorite prescription for how to practice the Sabbath and Psalm 46:10 is his meditative medicine. He describes the following practice of "subtracting one word at a time from Psalm 46:10" to help initiate the Sabbath and begin a time of rest.[97]

> Be still, and know that I am God.
> Be still, and know that I am.
> Be still, and know that I.
> Be still, and know that.

[94] Sleeth, *24/6*, 51-53.
[95] Sleeth, *24/6*, 111.
[96] Sleeth, *24/6*, 167.
[97] Sleeth, *24/6*, 157.

Be still, and know.
Be still, and.
Be still.
Be.

This meditative practice, especially in concert with slowing down breathing and finding a moment to quiet the mind and soul, paired with another Sabbath-habit such as lighting candles, or praying a prayer, can be an integral part of starting the Sabbath day in the right way and allow those who practice the Sabbath to participate in keeping it holy.

Sleeth, not a pastor himself, devotes a small section of his book to pastors or, as he affectionately calls us, "those who get paid to pray."[98] He cites Eugene Peterson's book, *Working the Angles*, and discusses the hypocrisy a pastor can feel when he is just playing a pastor instead of being one, often because of burnout.[99] Keeping the Sabbath, Sleeth says, allows a church leader to remember why they were called to ministry and what that call looks like. Sabbath is intended to be a reminder of "all that is good in God's world" and can help pastors avoid burnout or cynicism.[100]

For those in church leadership, Sleeth encourages generosity with employees and opposes a culture or environment that is akin to a "spiritual sweatshop."[101] How can a pastor help facilitate a community atmosphere of rest? The key is to be a person who rests. In remembering the call to ministry, a pastor should be encouraged to minister. By practicing a Stop Day, the pastor reminds himself that God is sovereign over the church and that he is simply participating in the work of God, not precipitating that work.

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[98] Sleeth, *24/6*, 136-137.
[99] Eugene H. Peterson, *Working the Angles: The Shape of Pastoral Integrity*. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1987.)
[100] Sleeth, *24/6*, 137.
[101] Sleeth, *24/6*, 137.

For the project portion of this thesis, to be discussed in greater detail in the following chapter, I plan to give Matthew Sleeth's *24/6* as a gift to each of the cohort participants after the trip to the mountains. This book will provide insightful reading on the topic of Sabbath for further thought and personal training regarding the practice of Sabbath-keeping. Swoboda's *Subversive Sabbath* was considered as an equipping resource, but Sleeth's book is a shorter, and more conversationally written work which offers the potential for more insight and contribution from cohort participants themselves. The doctor's medical, rather than ministerial background, provides another degree of credibility to the benefit of Sabbath-keeping.

Stop to rest and remember who God is and, consequently, who you are. This is the doctor's approach to Sabbath-keeping. There are many benefits to observing a Sabbath day, often physical, emotional, and even related to mental health. Most importantly, though, in keeping the Sabbath holy, a person is instilling a balance to life that tears down the barrier between sacred and secular and allows the ordinary to intersect with the holy. This is the day-to-day work of a pastor and by practicing Sabbath, a pastor can experience this as well.

CHAPTER FOUR

PROJECT OVERVIEW: PASTORAL MOUNTAIN COHORT

Introduction to the Project

This thesis-project, *Teaching Pastors to Sabbath via a Pastoral Mountain Cohort*, will utilize the questionnaire data about pastors and the Sabbath from chapter one, build upon the biblical and theological foundations for Sabbath in chapter two, and implement many of the insights of practicing a Sabbath day from the existing literature discussed in chapter three. The overarching goal of this thesis-project is to teach the principles of Sabbath practice to a small group of pastors and motivate those same pastors to begin practicing a weekly Sabbath. This will take place in the mountainous wilderness of the Twin Lakes area in central Colorado over four days, where the group will spend time camping, mountain climbing, in prayer, solitude, and in campfire teaching sessions and discussions on the Sabbath.

The teaching and discussion sessions, to be conducted each night under the stars and around a fire, will cover one of four critical aspects of the Sabbath and its practice. Night one, participants will study the Sabbath command to Rest. On the second night, we will discuss the Sabbath imperative to Remember what God has done. Night three will shift the discussion to what to do on one's Sabbath day, a conversation about healthy Recreation. On the final night, the group of pastors will consider the need for Rhythm in life, and how practicing the Sabbath could become part of a nourishing rhythm in their own lives.

The pastoral mountain cohort as a means of teaching Sabbath practice is intended to be more immersive than a seminar or Bible study group centered around the topic. Ideally, by retreating and leaving the work and ministry of one's typical context, the truth of Sabbath rest

can be felt rather than just taught. Additionally, by bringing together a small group of pastors who have similar work and life experiences, the group will be able to dialogue about practicing Sabbath in a unique environment with one another.

At the end of the pastoral mountain cohort, I will ask each individual to commit to practicing a weekly Sabbath for 10 weeks, to journal about their time and experience with Sabbath each week, which will involve being open to sharing their experience with me during and at the conclusion of the 10 weeks, and to encourage the others in the group with whom they shared the experience.

Gathering a Pastoral Cohort

The first step in this project was to assemble a small group of pastors who would be able to commit to going on a week-long trip to Colorado, during the week of September 12-16, 2022. Recruitment for these individuals began in January 2022 to ensure sufficient time for securing these pastors' commitments, allowing them to set their calendars at work, make the necessary arrangements at home, as well as assessing the financial costs associated with this trip. In order to construct the cohort, several factors were taken into consideration (described in greater detail below) such as: appropriate group size for this type of trip, experience with the Sabbath, dynamics within the group, prior experience with the Sabbath, pastoral/ministry experience, as well as personal fitness and prior wilderness experience.

With these factors in mind, I created a list of ten potential pastors whom I either know directly, have worked or served with in the past, or were recommended to me by another pastor. Knowing that it was likely that a number of these individuals in this initial selection group would not be able to attend a week-long trip, I felt comfortable reaching out to each of them within the same week while not exceeding an ideal group size. I called each pastor and asked if they would

like to join me on a trip to Colorado in the fall, as part of a cohort of pastors, who would spend the days climbing mountains and the evenings discussing the Sabbath and how to implement it into daily life. Potential participants were asked to pray about joining the trip, talk to their families, and discuss it with their church and supervisors. They were told that this was not a vacation but could even be considered continuing education, which allowed for at least one individual to sign on immediately.

Surprisingly, two individuals who immediately agreed and joined the cohort. Two others declined the invitation, one due to an existing commitment and another due to a new baby being born. I asked the others to finalize their decisions no later than March 2022, and by then four more had committed to the trip and two others were unable to attend. This brought the number of pastors to six. At this time, the decision was made to invite another participant, a layperson and friend from my church, to assist with trip logistics to create more margin for me to focus on the Sabbath curriculum. This cohort of six pastors plus one layperson, all located in Texas, were then able to acquire flights either together or coordinated to arrive on the same date and time. Two rental vehicles were also obtained, as were two campsites, to ensure that travel to and from our location as well as the setting itself would be secured well ahead of the fall rental season.

At this same time a group text message was created to begin an initial process of introductions and team building. While every one of these individuals was known to me, work was done to ensure they knew or were acquainted with at least one other pastor on this trip. The text message became a helpful atmosphere to prepare for the trip, create excitement, share tips for camping and hiking, and create a bond within the group. The group also met in person one month out from the trip to discuss the itinerary, packing list, key tips for summitting 14,000

peaks, and an outline of the Sabbath curriculum. The slideshow from this pre-trip meeting is found in Appendix 2.

Having given an overview of the formation of the cohort itself, I will now discuss the aforementioned factors used to determine potential participants.

Group Size

Group size was a major factor in assessing participants. Too few individuals would likely not provide the proper qualitative data needed to assess the outcomes of this project. Too few people can also hinder the teaching and learning dynamic of small group education. However, too many participants would provide logistical challenges and lead to less engagement on the part of the individuals themselves. In their book, *Resilient Ministry*, the authors recommend six to eight pastors as a proper cohort group size.[1] They believe that more than twelve exceeds the limits of a small group while a number under this allows participants to engage with the curriculum, speak and feel heard, and learn more closely from and with others.

The pastoral mountain cohort for this project consists of seven individuals plus myself, forming a near-ideal team of eight. This number functions well as a small group and provides numerous logistical advantages. Eight people allowed for the rental of two vehicles in Colorado for the week, one driven by me, the other by the layperson. More than eight participants decrease the amount of space for people and equipment in those vehicles or creates the need for a third vehicle, leading to more drivers and higher trip costs. This is also true of campsite rentals, as most sites in Colorado allow for two cars and up to eight campers.

[1] Bob Burns, Tasha D. Chapman, and Donald C. Guthrie, *Resilient Ministry: What Pastors Told Us about Surviving and Thriving* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2013), 283.

Additionally, more people require more food, equipment, water, and tents, all of which could be purchased or borrowed and must also fit in vehicles and at campsites. Additional cohort participants increase the complexity of the logistics exponentially, possibly creating stress or drawing attention away from the Sabbath curriculum and toward trip management. Therefore, I believe this cohort of eight people, six pastors, one participant plus myself, is an ideal size for this project.

Group Dynamics

Group size is one of several variables that can affect the overall morale and dynamic of a group. Three additional variables were considered in regard to group dynamics: commitment to Christian ministry, similar evangelical Christian theology and background, and existing relationships.

First, each participant in this trip is a pastor or, in the case of the layperson, committed to the church of Jesus Christ and His ministry on Earth. Having a group with similar and congruent ministry desires and experiences will contribute to worthwhile conversation and discussion about the Sabbath and how to implement the practice into a ministry-saturated lifestyle. In my experience, a cohort of pastors will be able to relate to one another with an unusually high level of camaraderie due to their shared experiences in life.

Second, comparable beliefs and Christian conviction were weighed in assembling this particular group. This is not to suggest that only evangelical pastors need the practice of Sabbath-keeping. Instead, accounting for the need to establish a bond of vulnerability and compatibility fairly quickly, a kinship of belief is advantageous. This allows the group an easier pathway to building trust with one another, understanding each other's goals in ministry and life, as well as providing similar language around prayer and ministry.

Third, previous relationships and interactions were taken into account to assess whether this group could coalesce together around this experience. This "reputational criterion" of participants from existing partnerships and friendships increases the likelihood of fruitful time together as well as continued accountability to practice the Sabbath for ten weeks after the trip itself.[2] Special care was given to ensure that each participant was at least familiar with one other person in the cohort aside from myself.

Experience with Sabbath

Beyond these variables of group dynamics and size, and for the specific purpose of teaching pastors to practice the Sabbath, invitations were specifically made to individuals who were either unfamiliar with Sabbath or who acknowledged that they do not regularly practice a weekly Sabbath. This information was gleaned through conversation or previous experience, not through the pastoral satisfaction and sabbath questionnaire. Some of the participants offered this information without being asked, having learned what this thesis-project would entail. Others were willing to share that they had previously attempted some type of weekly Sabbath but were no longer consistent.

This is helpful for this thesis-project for two reasons. First, it will allow for a group of pastors who are not yet practicing the Sabbath to learn about it, maybe for the first time, and learn how to institute it into their weekly lives. Rather than preaching to the choir, this affords the unique opportunity to teach to fresh, uninitiated ears. Secondly, it will provide necessary feedback to determine whether the Sabbath curriculum itself and the pastoral mountain cohort are valuable tools to teach pastors how to Sabbath.

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[2] Burns, Chapman, and Guthrie, *Resilient Ministry,* 265.

Group Demographics

This cohort of pastors is intentionally diverse in terms of church, ministry role, age, experience, church and staff size, and education level. By differentiating members of the group, the nightly discussion of Sabbath will benefit from a wide array of personal and ministry experiences. Including myself, the group is made up of members from 5 churches. Participant roles include a youth pastor, a small groups pastor, two worship pastors (one being bi-vocational), a pastor of production/worship, and a solo church planter. The church layperson also offers another layer of group diversity.

Ages of cohort members vary from 27 to 46, with experience in ministry ranging from two years to twenty-four years. One of the represented churches has under one-hundred members, another two are under one thousand, while two more are over two-thousand members. Additional ministry staff numbers span from one to forty. Each pastor within the group has at least a bachelor's degree, two are currently working on their master's degree from Dallas Theological Seminary, and two have completed Master of Divinity degrees.

Physical Fitness

Because of the unique nature of this Sabbath-teaching experience, physical fitness was also taken into consideration for each individual during the invitation process. Open and honest discussion about the need for physical exercise and some training for the trip helped the pastors decide whether it was right for them. No one needed to be in peak physical condition, as strenuous climbing and hiking are not the focus of the trip itself, but everyone was told that they, ideally, would be able to walk at a 3.5 mph pace for roughly one hour without needing to stop. Since invitations were made in January and the team solidified by March, over six months were given to each participant to begin getting into necessary shape.

Prior Camping Experience

Finally, prior camping experience was not considered. Although camping and time outdoors in Colorado are significant components of this thesis-project, none of the participants needed to have any previous knowledge or skill in these areas. It was my hope to provide any needed equipment as well as expertise, as this is a personal hobby and area of interest. Moreover, the addition of a layperson devoted primarily to this component of the trip eases the burden that any of the participants may have felt about setting up their tent, blowing up a sleeping pad, starting a fire, or any of the other things they might need to do.

In fact, because this group of pastors is learning about the Sabbath, it could be helpful that three of them have also never been camping. The uniqueness of the environment will contribute to the memorability of the experience and could provide an atmosphere for learning that is greater than expected.

Guiding an Intentional Mountain Experience

Having previous experience summitting 14,000-foot peaks in Colorado as well as guiding mountain and camping trips for groups of 5-8, I felt at home establishing an intentional mountain experience where participants would be able to enjoy creation and be challenged, taking a measured step outside of their comfort zone.

Selecting Location

The location for this pastoral mountain cohort was selected early in the process – Twin Lakes, roughly 20 minutes south of Leadville, in Central Colorado. Author Donald Miller, who recommends spending time outdoors as a crucial step in gaining a larger perspective on the world, oneself, and the Creator says: “Nature, in all its beauty, turns our minds away from

ourselves and draws us into the world around us."[3] Twin Lakes, Colorado is one of the most beautiful places in the state and provides an incredible setting to study the Sabbath.

Selecting Campsites

As described above, group size determines the number of campsites. State or federal campsites are better suited for groups than primitive campsites or open camping because of the process of setting up a site in any national forest area. State-run and federal campsites also allow for booking online well in advance of any trip. These campsites are more civilized than primitive sites, in that there is a bathroom facility (generally just a hole in the ground with a vaulted toilet), potable water, easier road access, firewood for sale, trash cans, picnic benches, and fire rings. Fire rings, specifically, are a necessity as Colorado is often under some level of fire restriction due to drought, high winds, and increased fire danger. Fire rings allow a fire to be lit during most times of the year.

Selecting and securing campsites occurred in March 2022 as the White Star Campground in Twin Lakes opens booking six months in advance. Two sites were obtained, each site allowing up to eight people, two tents, and two vehicles. With two sites, the cohort, which could fit in one site, has more room for multiple tents and some more space between them. The second site also provides a buffer from any other groups who may be camping, providing a more secluded, personal environment.

Selecting Mountains

The pastoral mountain cohort is not only going to the mountains, but also up the mountains. It is this author's intent that by setting a goal of ascending at least one, and up to

[3] Donald Miller, *Hero on a Mission: A Path to a Meaningful Life* (New York: HarperCollins Leadership, 2022), 100.

three, 14,000-foot peaks, the group will form tight-bonds, spend time intentionally in nature, and learn about themselves and the need for rest along the way. Diana Kappel-Smith writes that, "Plants and animals change as one goes up the mountain, and so, apparently, do people."[4] Spending the day climbing peaks and spending each night discussing Sabbath is intended to incite each of the participants to implement a weekly Sabbath into their lives.

Selecting peaks to climb is no easy task as there are no easy mountains to climb, at least none exceeding 14,000 feet. Trails vary in length, suitability to hikers, and even danger. There's no "bad view" from a mountain summit but some are certainly more breathtaking than others, altitude and lack of oxygen notwithstanding. Author Belden Lane, an avid outdoorsman, sees mountains as places of transformation, nicknaming them "the philosopher's oven" for the propensity that peaks offer to expand one's worldview.[5]

Thus, four criteria were used to select climbable peaks: distance from campsite to peak, length of trail, difficulty of climb, and views offered. With these criteria, three peaks were selected: La Plata Peak, Mt. Princeton, and Mt. Massive. Each mountain sits within a 45-minute drive from the campsite, offers a hike of less than ten miles, does not contain any extreme exposure or route-finding, and offers impeccable views of the Twin Lakes area, the San Juan Mountain range, and the Collegiate Peaks.

Equipment

None of the 14,000-foot peaks in Colorado require ropes, harnesses, or other rock-climbing equipment. However, a solid pair of hiking boots are a must. Each trip participant was

[4] Diana Kappel-Smith, *Desert Time: A Journey through the American Southwest* (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1992), 139.
[5] Belden C. Lane, *The Great Conversation: Nature and the Care of the Soul* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 203.

encouraged to obtain their own boots and break them in, starting as early as March 2022. Other outdoor clothing and equipment were recommended and reviewed through the cohort group text.

The other key piece of equipment for a summit of a mountain peak is a daypack, used to carry extra clothing, food, and water. Each participant was encouraged to pack at least 5L of water, a jacket, a diverse multitude of snacks, light toiletries, and other personal items in their packs. To help foster excitement among participants and as an initial thank you gift for joining the cohort, each member of the team received a 1L Nalgene water bottle – a necessity when camping and hiking.

Campsite supplies, including but not limited to tents, sleeping bags, sleeping pads, cooking equipment, coolers, and camp chairs were obtained and provided by the author. A stated goal to each participant was that they would not have to purchase anything for this pastoral mountain cohort, outside of a good pair of boots if they did not already own them. By removing this area of financial responsibility, participants were more likely to join the team and take on flight, vehicle, and food costs.

Safety

Safety on any camping trip is a high priority. When guiding a trip with members who have never been camping before, that responsibility increases. As the primary mountain guide on this trip, safety was considered well in advance and participant safety was an obligation throughout the cohort experience. The campsite location was selected, in part, due to its proximity to the Leadville Ranger Station, offering medical support if needed just twenty minutes away. Each peak was also selected with safety in mind, in terms of exertion required and potential danger on the trail. A medical kit was carried at all times on the trail by either me or the layperson, acting as secondary guide. Finally, a SPOT Satellite device was also carried at all

times, allowing anyone to send GPS coordinates to family members and, in case of major emergency, to search and rescue teams throughout Colorado.

Mountain Itinerary

The pastoral mountain cohort started on Monday, September 12 and ended on Friday, September 16. The intervening days, Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday, each followed a similar schedule: An early alpine start, before 4am, followed by a drive to the peak trailhead, the hike to summit the peak, descent, free time in the afternoon, dinner, and then time around the campfire discussing Sabbath curriculum.

Each day was filled with time on and in the mountains. Author Andrew Wilson writes that mountains are places where people encounter God and where God appears to His people. They communicate the distance between a human person and God, the finitude of a human life compared to the agelessness of the rock and ascending them requires advance preparation and planning.[6] Mountains are a wonderful metaphor for the Sabbath.

The full, detailed trip itinerary can be found in Appendix 3. Other trip information such as itinerary, equipment list, food and water recommendations, and the peaks themselves is found in the pre-trip slideshow in Appendix 2.

Teaching Sabbath to Pastors (Rest & Remember)

The curriculum for the pastoral mountain cohort, hereafter referred to as the Sabbath Guidebook, is found in Appendix 4. It includes two sections of teaching, divided into four specific sessions. The first section, Teaching Sabbath to Pastors, focuses on teaching the need

[6] Andrew Wilson, *God of All Things: Rediscovering the Sacred in an Everyday World* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2021), 73.

for, biblical foundation of, and intent of practicing the Sabbath. This first section, and the first two sessions in the Guidebook, draw heavily from chapters 1 and 2 of this thesis-project.

Before beginning the session on Monday night, each participant was gifted a pine-green, leather-bound journal with which to take notes during the pastoral mountain cohort and to write about their Sabbath experience in the ten-week period after returning home. After session one, as mentioned in chapter 3, each individual was also given a copy of Matthew Sleeth's book on practicing Sabbath, *24/6.* Participants could choose to read the book during their free time or save it for when they were home in Texas. The intention of giving pastors this book was to provide further reading on the Sabbath and encouragement to practice it each week for ten weeks.

Sabbath Session One: Rest

Each Sabbath Session followed a similar pattern of teaching content, group discussion, and questions about implementation of a weekly Sabbath into one's personal life. Session One, by far the longest and most content-heavy night began with the topic of burnout and included the data on pastoral satisfaction level from chapter 1. It was this author's hope that by first hearing the data surrounding burnout and Sabbath practice, an inward foundation for the practice would be established.

Participants discussed Genesis 2, Exodus 16, and Exodus 20, noting the biblical founding of the Sabbath as well as its commandment to the Israelites, and codification into Law in the 10 Commandments. Theologically rich, the group of pastors had good insights into these passages and offered their views freely. The progression from Sabbath in creation, to a command, to a law, was new to some of them and helped them to see the Sabbath as more than simply the 4th commandment. The cohort acknowledged that there is a plethora of Old Testament passages on

keeping the Sabbath holy, especially in the prophets. Although these were not discussed, it provided another point of emphasis on the Sabbath's integral role and importance for the people of God.

The group then considered Mark 2 and Jesus' declaration that He is Lord of the Sabbath, and that the Sabbath was made for man. Jesus does not deconstruct or disavow the Sabbath; He actually affirms the sacredness of it and restores it to its true intent. Jesus refuses to agree with the Pharisees that eating grain in a field is a violation of the Sabbath, offering instead a more biblical understanding of what it means to keep the day holy. By declaring the Sabbath made for man, Jesus ties it back to creation as something that God made, as well as to liberation from slavery as a mode of rest. Finally, the cohort looked at Matthew 11, and talked about the rest that is found in Christ.

Session One focused on the Sabbath command, specifically that the Sabbath is a day of rest. The cohort was encouraged to select one twenty-four-hour period in their week and to set it aside as their personal Sabbath. The goal on the Sabbath is to rest, to take a nap, to spend time away from work and even work-adjacent activity. There was abundant discussion about when to implement the Sabbath, how to do so, what had prevented the cohort from already practicing the Sabbath, potential threats to a weekly Sabbath, and how to rest.

For most of the group, the reason that they had not created a habit of Sabbath was internal. The belief or the weight of feeling absolutely essential and necessary to the work of the church, so that even a single day off could create an incredible burden throughout the rest of the week. As pastors it is tempting to believe that we are necessary—to God, to our church, to the ministry. Eugene Peterson says the opposite is true – we are not necessary. But God chooses to

work through us anyway.[7] The cohort was encouraged to see rest in Christ as not only restorative for the body and mind but also, even primarily, for the soul.

Sabbath Session Two: Remember

Sabbath Session Two occurred after a successful summit of La Plata Peak which included taking communion at 14,336 feet. This session incorporated the second element of the Sabbath – the command to remember the work of God and His identity-reorienting work in the lives of His people. The cohort studied what it means to remember the work of God, a wonderful companion to the practice of communion earlier in the day.

For biblical reference, participants examined Exodus 31 and Deuteronomy 5 which call the people of God to remember what God has done in both creation and in the Israelites' liberation from slavery in Egypt. Then, connected to Colossians 2:16 and Paul's description of the Sabbath as a "shadow" of Christ, the pastors were taught to see the Sabbath command to remember two things: 1) what God has done, and 2) who you now are in Christ.

These remembrances include a reorienting view of the work of ministry, continuing the conversation from Monday. David Rohrer, writing about ministry, reminds pastors, "We are not essential to the completion of God's task, we have been invited by God to participate in His work. Our job is to give witness to God's work, not to accomplish it on His behalf."[8] Just as the Israelites played no role in their rescue from Egypt and as Christians achieve no salvation for themselves, the Sabbath is a reminder that a pastor can rest from work because of what God has accomplished and because of who that pastor is in Christ.

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[7] Marva J. Dawn and Eugene H. Peterson, *The Unnecessary Pastor: Rediscovering the Call* (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2000), 2-4.
[8] David Rohrer, *The Sacred Wilderness of Pastoral Ministry: Preparing a People for the Presence of the Lord* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 78.

Author Mandy Smith offers another remembrance that Sabbath affords – that of a reminder of our impending death.[9] Remembering that we are not God is a reminder that we are going to die. She calls the Sabbath an opportunity to practice your death in two ways: 1) To get used to being in God's presence for the pure sake of it (as in Heaven) and 2) To learn to trust He can carry the world without us (as He will do after we're gone.) This is another self-orienting truth: that the work of God is not reliant on any one individual, and that reminder should take a weight off a pastor's shoulders and afford him the ability to rest.

On Tuesday, the discussion about Sabbath turned more toward what one should do with their time on the Sabbath, outside of refraining from work. To that end, the cohort was told of several activities that are helpful to remember who God is, what He has done, and who a pastor is as a result. Most importantly, time in Scripture is a gift of the Sabbath. Even if pastors spend hours of their week in the Word of God, much of it is rooted in their work. To grow spiritually, time in the Bible for the purpose of time with God is necessary. Dane Ortlund calls this the "Defining Habit" and says: "Accept and embrace the truth that you will go deeper with Christ no further than you go into Scripture."[10]

The pastors were taught to read the Bible on their Sabbath but to explicitly avoid passages or texts that might be work-adjacent, such as books of the Bible which may be on the preaching calendar, part of a mid-week Bible study, or curriculum for a class. The Psalms, wisdom literature, and the Gospels were each offered as specific books to engage with in the Bible on the Sabbath.

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[9] Mandy Smith, *Unfettered: Imagining a Childlike Faith beyond the Baggage of Western Culture* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2021), 27.
[10] Dane C. Ortlund, *Deeper: Real Change for Real Sinners* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2021), 151.

Further practice of meditation or contemplative prayer were also encouraged. Quiet time, with no discernible task or goal, was offered by some of the participants as a life-giving part of their spiritual life. Rising early, going outside or to a quiet place in the home, and simply sitting alone with God was already a habit for some. Incorporated into the Sabbath, it could be either a wonderful start to the day or a capstone of it.

Journaling was also suggested. Each of the pastors, their journals in hand, were already being asked to write about their experience with the Sabbath itself and many considered going further in writing out their prayers, writing personal thoughts, insights from Scripture, and more. The musicians within the group also talked about writing poetry or lyrics, a practice that was actually debated, and ultimately recommended by the group to avoid as it was part of their work.

This author suggested remembering the work of God and his provision of the Sabbath by praying the Jewish Kiddush at the opening and closing of each Sabbath day. The words provide an incredibly rich reminder of who God is and the purpose of the Sabbath: *Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the Universe. You have commanded us to observe the Sabbath and keep it holy.*

Teaching Pastors to Sabbath (Recreation & Rhythm)

Sabbath Sessions Three and Four were intentionally lighter on content to facilitate more discussion so participants could begin to think of their own plan for Sabbath. While Sessions One and Two were intended to teach the concept of Sabbath to pastors, the emphasis of this section is to teach pastors to practice the Sabbath.

Sabbath Session Three: Recreation

The Sabbath Guidebook for Wednesday included a reminder of the first two nights, the Sabbath commands to rest and remember. To begin, pastors studied Jesus' invitation to His disciples to withdraw from ministry for a time and go to the wilderness (Mark 6:31). This

invitation to be with Jesus and rest, perhaps not taking place on the Sabbath day of Israel, embodies the principles of the biblical Sabbath.

The curriculum for night three covered various activities that pastors could and should engage in on the Sabbath. This session was titled Recreation, due to the recreational activities that individuals might choose to do as well as the soul-restoring, re-creative quality of healthy recreation. A specific way to practice Sabbath-keeping is to stop doing things for work and start doing things for recreation. Mark Buchanan calls this the "Golden Rule" of Sabbath – to cease doing what is necessary and do something life-giving or "re-creating" for the soul.[11]

Tim Keller refers to finding "avocational time" on the Sabbath, doing something meaningful that is not part of a daily routine or work schedule.[12] The point of emphasis on this night was that the Sabbath isn't just for doing nothing. In his book, The Common Rule, Justin Whitmel Earley says, "Our souls need more than to do. They need to do restful things."[13] The cohort had a great discussion about what restful things they were already doing and were eager to begin.

The group, already outdoors, were told to try to spend some amount of time outside on the Sabbath. Pastor John Piper says: "If we would see the glory of God, we must rest." When Jesus said, "Come away by yourselves to a desolate (wild, wilderness) place and rest a while" (Mark 6:31) I think he was also speaking to us. Charles Spurgeon recommended breathing country air and letting the beauty of nature work in the human soul as part of Sabbath.[14] Wayne Muller, in his book on Sabbath, wrote that almost every person he spoke to about Sabbath said

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[11] Buchanan, *The Rest of God,* 128-129.
[12] Timothy Keller, "Redeemer Report," Six Ways to Practice Sabbath, March 2018, https://www.redeemer.com/redeemer-report/article/six_ways_to_practice_sabbath.
[13] Justin Whitmel Earley, *The Common Rule: Habits of Purpose for an Age of Distraction* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2019), 149.
[14] John Piper*, Brothers, We Are Not Professionals: A Plea to Pastors for Radical Ministry* (Nashville: B & H Publishing Group, 2013), 188.

that "time in nature is essential – it is singularly the most nourishing, healing Sabbath practice."[15] Participants talked about going fishing, going for a hike, taking a long Sabbath walk. Each of the pastors was excited to spend time outside.

Another activity that the cohort discussed, and that the married pastors were particularly excited to learn about, was sex on the Sabbath. "The Talmud prescribes the Sabbath as a time for making love."[16] Certain Jewish rabbinical guidelines include an injunction that married people should have sex on the Sabbath.[17] And in his highly popular book, *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry,* John Mark Comer also offers sexual intimacy as a healthy aspect of observing the Sabbath.[18]

Exercise on the Sabbath was also encouraged. In his book, *The Flourishing Pastor,* Tom Nelson writes that while it is of "the utmost importance as pastoral leaders to care for our souls, we must not neglect the importance of caring for our physical bodies."[19] Other activities were discussed including cooking, reading for fun, enjoying music, being creative with poetry, art, small crafts, or building with wood. This was, by far, the most engaging and fun conversation of each of the Sabbath sessions because it afforded each of the participants time to imagine what their Sabbath could be.

The conversation concluded with a reminder that the point of Recreation on the Sabbath is not to fill one's calendar with non-work activities. The Sabbath is intended for us to rest and remember. And true rest in Christ allows us to do things with our time that are beneficial to our soul, our mind, our body, our relationships. "On Sabbath, we get to enjoy and delight in creation

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[15] Wayne Muller, *Sabbath: Finding Rest, Renewal, and Delight in Our Busy Lives* (New York: Bantam Books, 1999), 80.
[16] Muller, *Sabbath,* 150.
[17] Marva Dawn, *Keeping the Sabbath Wholly* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1989), 192.
[18] John Mark Comer, *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry* (Colorado Springs: WaterBrook, 2019), 175.
[19] Tom Nelson, *The Flourishing Pastor: Recovering the Lost Art of Shepherd Leadership* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2021), 111.

and its gifts."[20] Recreation allows pastors to engage in activities outside the scope of their usual obligations and requirements and, in that way, be refreshed.

Sabbath Session Four: Rhythm

Session Four, taking place on the final night of the pastoral mountain cohort, covered the final R of the study of Sabbath – Rhythm. Like Session Three, this last session was created with less content and greater emphasis on group discussion and personal Sabbath imagination. The opening Bible verse for consideration was Psalm 46:10, to which the group would return to conclude this session.

The group discussed Rhythm as a necessary and healthy part of life and ministry and how Sabbath plays an essential role in providing that rhythm. In his book, *You're Only Human,* Kelly Kapic says, "Ignoring our need for such a pattern of rest means that we are functionally pretending to be the Creator and Sustainer."[21] One reason people tend to ignore the necessary rhythms of life is the failure to establish habits. To make Sabbath a part of a weekly rhythm means instituting a new habit. Habits are formed consciously and unconsciously, and eventually the habit has a formative effect.[22] Many habits are not healthy. Smoking, stress-eating, pornographic addiction, chewing fingernails, looking at the phone while driving, and more. Other habits, such as brushing teeth, kissing children goodnight, or saying "I love you" before hanging up the phone, can be healthy. Some habits, such as the Sabbath, are not only healthy but can also contribute to, and form, character over time.[23]

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[20] Peter Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 157.
[21] Kelly M. Kapic, *You're Only Human: How Your Limits Reflect God's Design and Why That's Good News* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2022), 221.
[22] Earley, *The Common Rule*, 7.
[23] Tish Harrison Warren, *Liturgy of the Ordinary: Sacred Practices in Everyday Life* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2016), 141.

At this point, each participant was challenged to commit to ten weeks of practicing a weekly Sabbath (one full 24-hour period) for the purpose of Resting, Remembering, and seeking Recreation. Pastors were encouraged that a true Sabbath is not a spur of the moment or a once-a-month practice that can be easily ignored or forgotten. Even every other week isn't an adequate rhythm, and it will eventually be supplanted by the needs of work or home. To practice the Sabbath well, to make it a habit, the cohort was encouraged to practice it once per week for ten weeks.

Conversation shifted to what day of the week each would choose, who they needed to tell (spouse, co-workers, supervisor, elders, church, etc.), and how the cohort could help each other commit to this new habit. The group was then asked to think back to their time on the trail, climbing mountains. The rhythm of one foot after another, one step up the trail at a time, the slow pace, the rhythmic breaking. When climbing a mountain, often "the body slides so completely into the rhythm of the trail that the mind follows its lead, relaxing comfortably into an effortless pattern."[24] The Sabbath could be similar, a day of rest, part of the rhythm of rest throughout a pastor's week that becomes a comfort and even an effortless pattern.

After choosing which day each participant would practice the Sabbath, this author shifted the focus to Sabbath rituals, things which could help initiate or guide each pastor on his Sabbath day. Mandy Smith, discussing rhythm, suggests: "A rhythm doesn't dictate the entire piece of music, it creates a consistent framework on which music can be made."[25] She then points to rituals as things that provide a stable framework of rhythm in our lives.

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[24] Belden C. Lane, *Backpacking with the Saints: Wilderness Hiking as Spiritual Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 7.
[25] Mandy Smith, *The Vulnerable Pastor: How Human Limitations Empower Our Ministry* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 141.

Optional rituals that were discussed included lighting two Sabbath candles at the start, reminding a pastor to Rest and Remember. Pairing this with a Sabbath prayer, even the Kiddush, is an intentional opening and closing to the Sabbath. Intentional breathing exercises were also suggested, taking time each Sabbath to spend even one minute focused on breathing. Wayne Muller says about Sabbath breathing, "Simply return your awareness to the breath. Silently note each inhale or exhale."[26] Breathing is a great rhythm-establishing activity.

Furthermore, Dr. Matthew Sleeth's favored prescription for how to initiate the Sabbath includes the practice of "subtracting one word at a time from Psalm 46:10" to usher in the time of rest.[27] Peter Scazzero talks about a "Protective Container" of rules and limits around Sabbath, making a list to help make the Sabbath intentional. For example, "On Sabbath I will… / On Sabbath, I will not…"[28]

One final discussion occurred before closing out the Sabbath Session, establishing a rhythm on Sabbath in regard to technology. Andy Crouch talks about how technology has filled every corner of our lives and because of technology, "we do less and less of the two things human beings were made to do – work and rest."[29] Because of this, it's very likely that "the most important way you might Sabbath is to turn off screens."[30] Gavin Ortlund talks about taking the Sabbath as the one day a week you spend away from social media, with your phone turned off, with your computer closed.[31]

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[26] Muller, *Sabbath,* 75.
[27] Sleeth, *24/6*, 157.
[28] Peter Scazzero, *The Emotionally Healthy Leader: How Transforming Your Inner Life Will Deeply Transform Your Church, Team, and the World* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), 167-168.
[29] Andy Crouch, *The Tech-Wise Family: Everyday Steps for Putting Technology in Its Proper Place* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2017), 83.
[30] Earley, *The Common Rule*, 157.
[31] Gavin Ortlund, "7 Ways to Work Hard at Rest," *The Gospel Coalition*, last modified March 3, 2018, accessed September 8, 2022, https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/7-ways-to-work-hard-at-rest/.

Even if one believes it absolutely necessary to have the phone on at all times or to be able to use the computer, social media or other electronic devices, the cohort was asked to consider the possibility of a "Techno Sabbath," even for just a portion of the day, and how this could positively impact their Sabbath.[32] Some sort of technological limit, especially on the Sabbath, is healthy and perhaps necessary. Tony Reinke talks about our "hyper-connection" through social media and how it can cause us to "forget about big, glorious realities like the inbreaking new creation of God."[33] And isn't that the purpose of the Sabbath? To remember the big, glorious realities of God.

The cohort closed this final session praying Psalm 46:10, utilizing Dr. Sleeth's model of subtracting one word each time, allowing each participant to pray the Psalm with one fewer word until finishing with "Be." The cohort members then spent time around the fire reminiscing about the week, sharing highlights, things they'd learned about mountains or Sabbath, and enjoying fellowship. Dr. Ashley Denton emphasizes the importance of finishing wilderness experiences well, providing a sense of closure, because bringing an adventure to a close "validates the experience as real for each of the participants."[34]

Another aspect of bringing closure to the trip was the reminder of the Sabbath journals, provided on night one, as a shared tool for each of the pastors to utilize as they set out to implement a weekly Sabbath into their lives. The journals afforded an anchor for practicing what had been learned in the mountains back home. Participants began to set up weekly reminders, via text, phone calls, or emails, to encourage one another in following through with the ten-week

[32] Abram Kielsmeier-Jones, "Sabbath-Keeping for Pastors," *CT Pastors* (*Christianity Today*, October 2021), last modified October 2021, accessed September 8, 2022, https://www.christianitytoday.com/pastors/2016/august-web-exclusives/sabbath-keeping-for-pastors.html.
[33] Tony Reinke, *12 Ways Your Phone Is Changing You* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2017), 155.
[34] Ashley Denton, *Christian Outdoor Leadership* (Fort Collins: Smooth Stone Publishing, 2011), 142.

commitment. I also set up a bi-weekly check in with each participant, one after their first week of Sabbath, and then every other week until one concluding phone call at the end of their Sabbath experiment. This should serve to not only foster a higher degree of accountability, but following up after they return home should help them apply any changes of habit or other decisions they had made while away.[35]

The final follow-up conversation will differ from the previous check ins. Rather than being simply an encouragement to continue the practice it will also include a debrief about the whole ten-week experience. Following more of an interview outline, this conversation will collect qualitative data regarding each cohort member's experience with keeping a weekly Sabbath, insights gained about themselves or the practice itself, and their likelihood to continue the practice as a part of their spiritual life. Information gathered from these interviews will be discussed in the following chapter.

[35] Denton, *Christian Outdoor Leadership*, 145.

CHAPTER FIVE

OUTCOMES

The Need for Teaching Pastors to Sabbath

The purpose of this thesis-project was to study the effectiveness of leading a cohort of pastors into the wilderness in Colorado to teach about the Sabbath and how to implement its practice into life and ministry. It was this author's desire that the pastoral mountain cohort would be meaningful in and of itself and that, after ten weeks of keeping a weekly Sabbath, the pastors involved would experience greater satisfaction in their personal and spiritual lives and seek to incorporate the Sabbath into their life going forward

Of the six pastors and one layperson involved in the mountain cohort, nearly every member acknowledged and described having felt some symptom of burnout in the past year. The World Health Organization, in its International Disease Classification (ICD-11) now categorizes burnout as an actual syndrome that results from "chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed."[1] While most of the pastors felt they were managing their burnout and stress levels well, they all felt that they were simply surviving, rather than finding opportunities to truly rest. Several individuals also acknowledged that they had developed at least one mechanism for treating burnout that, while not necessarily unhealthy, was not something they felt was sustainable or wholesome for life in ministry.

The Sabbath is not a means to an end for a healthier lifestyle or another tool for managing burnout. However, "Sabbath rest depicts the good and flourishing life God designed us to live,"

[1] Sara Berg, "Who Adds Burnout to ICD-11. What It Means for Physicians.," *American Medical Association*, July 23, 2019, https://www.ama-assn.org/practice-management/physician-health/who-adds-burnout-icd-11-what-it-means-physicians.

and allows for a pastor to do more than survive the pressures of ministry but to thrive.[2] Just as intentional time in Scripture, a personal devotional and prayer life, and other spiritual practices are necessary for growing in faith and spiritual maturity, so too is the Sabbath a helpful and essential spiritual discipline.

One of the members of the cohort, a worship pastor, had resigned from his position at his church, and while he is still involved in worship ministry, he talked openly about how the lack of rhythm and rest in the life of his church and staff team developed into an acutely unhealthy culture. He said that his wife urged him to leave ministry at this church in order to preserve his soul, and so that they, as a family, could return to the spiritual disciplines of prayer and Sabbath that they had been doing before he joined this congregation. Daniel Stegman, a pastor and advocate of Sabbath for ministry leaders, in an article titled *The Pastors Need for Sabbath* suggests that "if we don't slow down, we won't uncover those toxic patterns in our lives that are holding us back."[3] This worship pastor's perspective on the dangers of burnout and unhealthy ministry and work cultures provided useful insights for the rest of the group.

As the cohort settled around the campfire or the picnic table each day for our "Sabbath Sessions" it became clear that while the general biblical principles of the Sabbath were understood by almost everyone involved, the application of these principles was either novel or had not been utilized in some time. Every cohort member, in some way, articulated their belief that the principle of Sabbath was both biblical and beneficial. However, most either felt ill-

[2] Tom Nelson, *The Flourishing Pastor: Recovering the Lost Art of Shepherd Leadership* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2021), 97.
[3] Dan Stegeman, "The Pastors Need for Sabbath Rest (or, the Unplanned Sabbatical) - the Gospel Coalition: Canada," The Gospel Coalition | Canada, September 13, 2020, https://ca.thegospelcoalition.org/article/the-pastors-need-for-sabbath-rest-or-the-unplanned-sabbatical/.

equipped to keep a weekly Sabbath, were never taught how to do so, or did not know how to get started and so chose not to.

The first two sessions answered the question – What is the Sabbath? The focus was on the Sabbath as an opportunity to Rest and Remember. These sessions provided wonderful discussion and allowed for deep study of the Bible. The final two sessions, which centered on Recreation and Rhythm and attempted to answer the question – How do you Sabbath? – were most useful in understanding what a Sabbath might look like for each participant. The intention was to equip pastors with a robust theology of the Sabbath as well as practical tools for how to practice it and incorporate it into their lives is clear.

Evaluation of the Project

Feedback from the group of pastors during the trip itself and then in the follow-up phase provided excellent qualitative data regarding the effectiveness of teaching the Sabbath through a pastoral mountain cohort. In order to evaluate the project and its outcomes, interview data was collected from each of the participants during and after a subsequent ten-week commitment to practicing a weekly Sabbath. The data during the cohort and from after the ten-week experience are separated below to demonstrate the effectiveness of teaching the Sabbath via a mountain cohort and the benefit of a weekly Sabbath for pastors.

Evaluation of the Project on the Mountain

Ruth Haley Barton defines retreat as a "strategic withdrawal from areas of danger" and emphasizes the need for such retreats from spiritual battles that Christians encounter.[4] This pastoral retreat to the mountains to learn about Sabbath, a strategic withdrawal from work and

[4] Ruth Haley Barton, *Invitation to Retreat: The Gift and Necessity of Time Away with God* (Downers Grove: IVP Books, 2018), 11.

typical life, proved to be a unique experience for each of the participants. Each cohort member expressed the sentiment that the time away to learn about Sabbath was absolutely necessary and that the curriculum would not have been as impactful in a classroom setting.

One of the primary benefits of teaching about the Sabbath in a wilderness setting was allowing creation itself to provide a sense of wonder and humility. One of the pastors, a native Texan who is used to flat, urban environments, on a drive to a nearby mountain for a day of hiking remarked simply, "Mountains are big." The perspectival shift in environment alone, he said later, was instrumental for leaving work and worries behind to focus on the content of the Sabbath study.

This theme, the necessity of being away from work, family, and home in order to learn to rest, became a common refrain among participants. During the first night's session, the emphasis on Sabbath Rest struck a chord with one specific individual. A man who prides himself on working hard, he admitted that he typically saw the Sabbath as a reward for his hard work, the capstone to a good week. The paradigm shift that occurred for him, he said, was that the Sabbath is a not a reward but a gift. Thus, rather than seeing the Sabbath as the end of the week, he suggested viewing it as the beginning. If he began to live with the Sabbath as the first day of his work week, then he could live out of a place of rest and return to it when his week was finished.

Two other unique benefits of mountain hiking and time in the wilderness are the unpredictability of weather and personal, physical limitations. Plans for climbing three separate peaks, as discussed in chapter four, quickly changed due to freezing temperatures and snow on two of those peaks. Two individuals needed to turn around on a climb due to altitude affecting them in unforeseen ways. This, in its own way, provided a memorable lesson about rest and accepting limitation. Part of practicing the Sabbath is acknowledging and honoring one's own

human limitations and there is something "deeply spiritual about honoring the limitations of our existence as human, physical bodies."[5]

One of the members who turned back, the oldest participant, a pastor who has led multiple Youth ministry trips to Colorado, shared that it was difficult when he was forced to turn back before reaching the summit. During the second teaching session he felt convicted by the idea of the purpose of Sabbath as spending time with God purely for the sake of time with Him. He insightfully told the group, "As an achiever I felt it so difficult to turn around on that mountain. But I felt like learning to Sabbath is learning to spend time with God for the pure sake of it, not for achieving my goals." The idea that the Sabbath is a call to Remember who God is and one's identity in Christ resonated strongly with him and others in the group.

Similarly, another pastor said he feels his job is primarily to help remind people of who God is, but that he does not take time to do that himself. His identity in ministry, he said, overshadowed his personal identity in Christ. The issue of identity and what it means to be a pastor came up throughout each of the four discussions. Some felt that it was their highest calling in life but that it interfered with their marriages or parenting. Others felt they were neglecting their call to be present as a father and husband. The interplay between identity and rest and how to rest in God rather than in one's work was one of the central tenets of the first and second Sabbath sessions.

The third and fourth sessions provided the most time for personal reflection regarding how to initiate a weekly Sabbath. This allowed the group to encourage one another in unexpected ways. The participants, who by now were much more comfortable with each another, began offering insight into which recreative activities or rhythms others could begin to practice.

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[5] Ruth Haley Barton, *Embracing Rhythms of Work and Rest: From Sabbath to Sabbatical and Back Again* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2022), 98.

Suggestions of Sabbath meals, candle-lighting, date lunches with a wife, time writing music, or being outdoors, were shared freely in these discussions.

The youngest member of the group, a single seminary student, confessed that he felt guilty that he was letting God down if he did not study every single day. He admitted that he came into the trip with a somewhat negative view of the Sabbath as an outdated, Old Testament principle that was legalistic and lacking in grace. He was the only individual who expressed the belief that the Sabbath must be kept on Sunday. He asked if he could observe any day as the Sabbath, and while there are certainly some theologians who would argue no, the group contended that yes, any day could work.[6] He was excited and relieved when the other pastors in the circle told him he could spend time with friends and refrain from the work of studying his textbooks as an act of both submission to God and rest on the Sabbath.

One pastor encouraged the group that the Sabbath was not just a tool for self-help or self-care. Additionally, someone chimed in, the Sabbath is not a means to an end of higher efficiency in ministry. In her book *Mudhouse Sabbath,* Lauren Winner describes this as "justification for Sabbath rest," and argues that pastors must resist the urge to rest for one day a week in the hope that it will lead to more productivity the other six.[7] The Sabbath does not need to be justified in order to be practiced.

On the third day, as the group made plans for what to do on their final day together, the worship pastor who had recently left his role confided in the group, "This was the single best day I've had with God in the past six months." He then called his wife and shared some of what he was experiencing and hoping to implement when he came home. Other participants also shared

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[6] David Wilber, *Remember the Sabbath: What the New Testament Says about Sabbath Observance for Christians* (Clover: Pronomian Publishing LLC, 2022), 163.
[7] Lauren F. Winner, *Mudhouse Sabbath: An Invitation to a Life of Spiritual Discipline* (Brewster: Paraclete Press, 2015), 11.

the excitement of returning home and sharing with their spouse and family how they were hoping to begin to keep the Sabbath regularly.

The time on the mountain appeared to be a successful environment through which to impart curriculum and teach about the Sabbath to a group of pastors. The commitment to participate in a trip away from home and work increased the level of buy-in to the teaching times. Additionally, the composition of the group allowed for members to have meaningful conversations about church, family, and spiritual issues among a band of like-minded brothers. Each participant, equipped with a greater understanding of the Sabbath, went home with a plan to incorporate Sabbath practice into their lives for ten weeks.

Evaluation of the Project at Home

After the cohort ended and the participants each returned to their respective homes, communication continued regularly among the individuals via text message. The group encouraged each other to keep up with their weekly Sabbath and shared helpful insights, quotes from reading or study, articles about Sabbath rest, as well as prayer requests. This author checked in with each participant regularly to encourage them to continue to practice the Sabbath each week and to clarify any questions that arose. A final follow-up interview was scheduled after the ten weeks had ended for the purpose of evaluating their overall experience.

Final interviews lasted between 30-minutes and one-hour and took place either online utilizing Zoom or in person over a meal or coffee. Each interview followed the same template, which can be found in Appendix 5, and consisted of three sets of questions. The first series of open-ended questions gathered information about that individual's feelings about the pastoral mountain cohort and their experience with a weekly Sabbath. The next set of questions consisted of eight statements regarding the individual's level of personal satisfaction in several areas of life

and ministry, the same set of questions from the first Sabbath questionnaire. Finally, participants were asked to share anything they found helpful or that they felt could benefit others in their practice of the Sabbath.

As expected from the earlier responses to the retreat during the trip itself, the post-trip response to the pastoral mountain cohort was highly positive. Several individuals noted that this was the first trip without family and without work commitments they had ever taken. Others noted that it broke their typical routine of hard work followed by time away to crash because it was more than just a vacation or "time off". One participant called the trip a "pivotal week" in his life, arguing that he needed just such an entry point, away from his usual life, if he was ever going to start taking Sabbath seriously.

The setting was clearly a highlight. Colorado in September, even with unseasonably cold weather, is a magical place. But the lack of internet access in the wilderness was an important added benefit. Several younger, more technologically adept cohort participants said that not being connected to their devices allowed them to connect more deeply with others and with nature as they learned about rest. The one layperson on the trip shared that he had always heard about the Sabbath, felt like he knew about it, and was finally learning how to apply it. He said that learning around the campfire was the most fun and impactful part of each day.

Participants were especially eager to incorporate the Sabbath into their family disciplines and to share it with their wives. "I was beaming by the end of the week, when I was reunited with my family," said one pastor. Another felt "refreshed and inspired" to start practicing Sabbath with his kids. Participants with children, especially younger-aged children, were thankful for the time away to learn to rest in a season of life when rest and sleep are scarce. They

were encouraged by the older pastors on the trip who were able to share how they navigated the busy seasons of life and sought to rest.

Finally, regarding the time on the mountain, several individuals responded positively to the amount of time spent studying the Bible for both a foundation and principles for practicing the Sabbath. "Time in Scripture was key," said one of the pastors who wanted to better understand the biblical basis for Christian practice of the fourth commandment. Several individuals noted that reading the Bible on their Sabbath felt different after the trip, and that they enjoyed it more. In her book on Sabbath, Jewish author Judith Shulevitz suggests that "Whenever people begin reading the Book, they start keeping the Sabbath. And when they keep the Sabbath, they read the Book."[8] This sentiment was shared by one pastor who said he now looked forward to reading the Bible on the Sabbath instead of seeing it as a chore.

Concluding the first section of questions, each participant was asked three true or false statements. They were asked if they felt they had been taught sufficiently about the Sabbath, if they felt it was important for life and ministry, and whether they would continue to seek to implement the Sabbath in their lives beyond the ten weeks. Every participant answered that they felt that all three of these statements were true. The positive responses to these questions, that each cohort member felt the Sabbath was important and that they would seek to continue to practice it, allow for this author to determine the project a success.

The second unit of questions asked participants to rate if they felt more satisfied, less satisfied, or about the same level of satisfaction in eight areas of life and ministry. These included how they felt about their church/ministry, their time reading the Bible, their level of attentiveness to family, and their relationship with their wives. Because these questions had been

[8] Judith Shulevitz, *The Sabbath World: Glimpses of a Different Order of Time* (New York: Random House Trade, 2011), 119.

asked anonymously in the original questionnaire, everyone was told they could decline to answer if they felt uncomfortable with any question, although none declined.

On each of the eight satisfaction questions, every participant recorded a higher satisfaction level in at least one area of their lives. Many indicated no change in satisfaction level in certain areas. Only one participant noted a lower satisfaction on one question – the satisfaction he felt with his friends/peers – which he noted was likely due to his greater investment into his family on his Sabbath day. Every member noted a greater level of satisfaction in their personal relationship with God during their ten-week keeping of the Sabbath. This data demonstrates a correlation between a consistent Sabbath practice and greater levels of satisfaction in ministry, relationships, and spiritual well-being. A catalogue of each participant's responses to the satisfaction questions can be found in Appendix 6.

Finally, each interview concluded with a discussion of insights and reflections from the participants' Sabbath journals. Each of the seven individuals contributed things they had found helpful and advice for how to teach or encourage others to keep the Sabbath. The four themes that arose consistently in each interview were the need for accountability, prioritizing Sabbath with spouse and family, implementing life-giving habits, and limiting technology on the Sabbath.

Each cohort member noted, either on the mountain or in their interview, that having a group of people who were also practicing the Sabbath for the ten-week period was a significant motivator to fulfill their commitment to taking a day away from work to rest and remember. Every individual also noted that they had a follow-up conversation with their wife, or girlfriend in the case of the younger, single participant. By sharing one's desire to practice the Sabbath, each pastor had a structure of accountability.

Five of the seven individuals also chose to involve their wives in the ten-week Sabbath experiment and to attempt to keep it as a family. For the five who chose to do this, keeping the Sabbath day with their wives was a blessing and made the day far more enjoyable. Participants with children noted varied results as far as involving the family but were glad to have the opportunity to explain the Sabbath to their children.

According to one respondent, the primary benefit of trying to involve the entire family was the prioritization of the Sabbath in the hectic family schedule. He said, "prioritizing the Sabbath means saying no to certain things, even good things." To make the Sabbath a habit, he recognized the need for consistency which meant declining certain invitations to join friends or family for certain activities that would not have contributed to rest.

Saying no to certain activities also allowed cohort members to say yes to life-giving habits or new rituals. One participant said that a Sabbath lunch with his wife became the best time of week for the two of them to have a conversation without their elementary-school aged kids or work interrupting them. "We know that Sabbath is coming every week and that's encouraging," he said, adding, "If nothing else, we know it will be there."

A pastor who enjoys cooking but felt that he could not do it often due to his schedule enjoyed the opportunity to cook large meals for his family on Sunday afternoons. A worship pastor said he began playing his guitar and writing music that was not for work but simply for the enjoyment of it. Several participants noted that they would light a candle to open and close their Sabbath day. One pastor, whose wife is a medical doctor in a high-stress setting, said that the two of them chose to pray Psalm 46:10, subtracting one word at a time, back and forth, as the initiation to their Sabbath.

These Sabbath practices and rituals created rhythms to each person's week and to the day itself. The rhythm of entering the Sabbath day, the acknowledgement of resting from work, and the preparation for going back into the work of ministry provided a sense of engagement and withdrawal which, one individual noted, helped him to see ministry as more than just a job but as an outpouring of his own relationship with God. This "constant back and forth motion" is an invaluable perspective for pastors as they seek to live a life of balance and rhythm.[9]

The fourth theme that arose in each interview was the need to interact with technology differently on the Sabbath. Because so much work is done on laptops and smartphones, to utilize those same tools of work on a day of rest would create a temptation to work or an inability to disconnect and refrain from ministry. Two pastors created "No Device Day" for their families, have each family member, children included, refrain from using television, laptops, tablets, and smartphones for the entire day. Another pastor chose to leave his laptop in his car and found himself not missing it. One pastor simply changed his smart phone background when he started his Sabbath, which served as a visual reminder of his commitment to cease working and rest.

Technology, it turns out, was one of the biggest hindrances to Sabbath rest for a few of the participants. Congregants would text about the sermon from a few hours before, staff members would email questions for the coming week, and the draw to remain productive often proved too strong. After two weeks struggling with what to do with his phone, one cohort member simply turned it off. He recognized that this might not become a perpetual practice, but he needed to start somewhere. This was his advice for how to handle technology differently on the Sabbath day and it is a good encouragement for anyone attempting to incorporate a weekly Sabbath into their personal life – "Just start. You don't have to be perfect. Just start."

[9] Ruth Haley Barton, *Strengthening the Soul of Ut Leadership: Seeking God in the Crucible of Ministry* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2018), 123.

Constraints of the Project

Teaching Sabbath through a pastoral mountain cohort, while effective, was not without its constraints. There are several challenges to initiating a wilderness experience, gathering a cohort, assessing data, and more. Four chief constraints arose that are worth addressing.

Data Collection

In order to collect data to test the hypothesis that pastors who practice Sabbath experience greater satisfaction than those who don't, the initial questionnaire was sent to a wide range of pastors and ministry staff. For the sake of anonymity and responsiveness, this initial questionnaire was anonymous. This allowed respondents to answer honestly and without fear of exposure or potential repercussions. While I do still believe this was the best means of obtaining valuable data from a large pool of individuals, I believe there may have been an opportunity to assess the cohort group itself in a different manner to test their level of satisfaction before and after the Sabbath experience.

Perhaps, as a level of entry to participate in the cohort itself, those individuals would be asked to fill out the questionnaire without anonymity. Confidentiality could still be protected in a variety of ways, principally via online and private collection of data. If a participant did not feel comfortable with an online questionnaire, the questions could be administered in a private interview setting. Additionally, assurances could be made that none of the answers would be shared with home churches or other cohort members.

This data would allow this author as well as the participants themselves to compare/contrast their responses over time, especially before and after the pastoral mountain cohort as well as before and after the ten-week Sabbath experiment at home. With this more specific and qualitative data, the quantitative data would include numerical evidence as well.

Lack of Female Participants

Another clear constraint to this project was the makeup of the cohort itself and the fact that no women were included. The initial Sabbath questionnaire was sent to and completed by both men and women in ministry. However, no female ministers were invited to join the pastoral mountain cohort. This was done intentionally for a variety of reasons, one being the necessity of separate accommodations and preservation of group dynamics of an all-male cohort. Additionally, same-sex cohorts often allow for unique bonding and opportunities to share and discuss certain topics and issues more freely.

Still, the lack of a single female perspective on Sabbath rest should not be overlooked. It is my sincere hope that the principles of teaching Sabbath via a small group cohort can be applied to a multitude of groups, including groups of women in ministry. Perhaps future cohorts could plan more effectively to include men and women, whether simply through separate lodging, adjacent groups led by a female minister, or even the inclusion of wives who also bear the weight of ministry.

Difficulty of Time Away

The Sabbath retreat proved costly in several ways for each participant. Some of the participants noted that while the financial expense was not prohibitive, it was still significant. Flights, equipment, meals, transportation in Colorado, and other expenses added up. While no one declined participation due to the financial costs, the decision to host a trip in Colorado creates unique financial challenges.

Another substantial cost was time away from work and family. Each cohort member had to give up four days of their week to partake in the pastoral mountain cohort. While the trip was planned intentionally so that no one would miss a Sunday at church, there were still meetings,

Bible studies, classes, and other important activities that had to be rescheduled. This also includes time with family and children's activities as more than one participant missed a child's extracurricular activity.

Challenges of Mountain Setting

A fourth constraint on the project itself was the choice of a difficult wilderness setting in which to host the teaching on Sabbath. The project, a pastoral mountain cohort, intended to utilize a wilderness retreat as a means of spiritual education. This was clearly a highlight of the project for all the participants. However, the challenge of hiking to the top of a 14,000-foot peak in Colorado is a distinct physical and even emotional challenge. Not every member of the cohort summited a peak and weather affected the attempts on the other two peaks.

Summiting a mountain was not the overall goal of the trip, but it did provide a good challenge and team-building opportunity which allowed the group to bond. However, the discouragement from being unable to complete the climb, as well as the physical toll on the body from attempting or completing the climb, could draw energy and attention away from the Sabbath sessions and emphasis on rest. When gathering the mountain cohort, attention was given to the physical capabilities of each member. However, this could discourage the potential or future inclusion of a participant who would not be physically capable of hiking up a peak.

The benefits of the wilderness environment are clear – the beauty and inspiration of nature. However, other wilderness locations could prove equally beneficial without the extremes of weather and physical challenges. This author would not have changed the setting of this particular mountain cohort, but it is a notable constraint on the project.

Areas for Further Study

Three questions about the Sabbath became immediately clear throughout this project and present themselves as areas for further study. First, if the Sabbath is so vital to the spiritual health and well-being of pastors, then how can pastors also teach and guide their congregations to keep the Sabbath? Secondly, what is the most effective way to incorporate Sabbath practice into family life with a spouse and children? Third, what is a healthy relationship between the Sabbath and technology?

Lay People and the Sabbath

The choice to include a layperson in this thesis-project served as a primer to the idea of teaching Sabbath to congregants. If some pastors feel that Sabbath is just a "nice idea, or a lofty, pleasant-sounding but unattainable goal," that thinking will certainly spread to the congregants whom they lead.[10] A healthy, biblical understanding and theology of the Sabbath can be instrumental for pastors as well as parishioners.

Furthermore, by developing a more robust understanding of the Sabbath day as well as the pastor's intention to refrain from work and rest on that day, a pastor could develop within his congregation an increased awareness of the need to protect his emotional, physical and spiritual health. Teaching a church about the Sabbath and how to practice it could also lead to greater accountability for the pastor to take time to rest.

It is one thing to teach about the Sabbath in a classroom or from the pulpit and quite another to lead people through an experience for how to practice it. In the same way that this thesis-project explored a unique occasion to instruct pastors about the Sabbath, there could also

[10] MaryAnn McKibben Dana, *Sabbath in the Suburbs: A Family's Experiment with Holy Time* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2012), 4.

be alternatives to a sermon or Bible study for teaching the lay people of a church about the fourth commandment.

The biblical truths of the Sabbath and how to keep it are not specific to pastors, but how would teaching these things to a group of laypeople change the curriculum? Many individuals in churches work a 5-day a week work schedule and a 2-day weekend. These weekends often become crowded with children's activities, errands, and preparation for the following week. Even Sunday church attendance is affected by these weekend activities which often do not cause a person to rest or remember. Would more attention be needed on the theological foundation for the Sabbath, or would greater consideration be given to teaching what healthy recreation looks like? What about church members who do not work typical schedules, or those who work night shifts, or individuals in hospitals or hospitality who have irregular scheduling each week? What does the Sabbath look like for people who are not pastors?

Sabbath and Family

Almost every participant commented in his interview that the involvement of his wife as well as their children was a major component of their keeping the Sabbath day. There is ample biblical and traditional evidence of the Sabbath being a familial, communal practice. Thus, should the Sabbath be a family commitment? How can this take place with children in school or those who do not work a normal schedule? What does work mean for children? These are just a handful of questions that could be addressed in a deeper study of the Sabbath and its place in the Christian family.

There are numerous ways to involve a spouse or children into a weekly Sabbath, such as having them light a candle, praying together, or sharing a Sabbath meal. But perhaps incorporation into an aspect of the Sabbath is not a wholistic keeping of the day as it is intended.

The Sabbath is made for man to rest and remember, and that time alone with the Lord is not only useful but needed. But does an individualistic approach to the Sabbath contribute to unhealthy feelings of a pastor being alone in ministry? How and when to keep the Sabbath as a family and when to spend time alone is worth considering in order to keep the Sabbath from being just a day off for pastors.

Sabbath and Technology

A third area for further study in both the theology of the Sabbath and how to keep it well is the role of technology in Sabbath practice. The Jewish Sabbath, to this day, prohibits the use of certain tools and technology. Sabbath elevators run continually in hotels so that an individual keeping the Sabbath will not have to press a button. This author would not recommend this level of technological asceticism on the Sabbath, yet technological devices were cited by each cohort member as the primary means of distraction or temptation to work on the Sabbath day. How should Christians interact with the internet, their smart phones, email, and other useful technology that either brings work to mind or is ministry-adjacent? Is technology always a gift from God or are there examples of technology that Christians should not engage with on the Sabbath day? Can some technology be acceptable for some individuals to utilize on the Sabbath, for example TV, movies, laptop, while those same devices are unacceptable for others to use?

As a first step into keeping the Sabbath, perhaps encouraging individuals to apply a techno-Sabbath is the most effectual starting point. Experiencing a different relationship with technology on the Sabbath is one of the more effective means of involving a family as well as teaching lay people the significance of its practice. If children, from a young age, viewed the Sabbath as a day away from technology, if more church members took intentional time off from

their devices, and if pastors felt the freedom to turn off their email for twenty-four hours, how might that affect the spiritual well-being of an entire community?

For further study in this area, and as potential literature review resources for further study, this author recommends *The Shallows* by Nicholas Carr, *12 Ways Your Phone is Changing You* by Tony Reinke, and Andy Crouch's *Tech Wise Family*.

Conclusion

Overall, the response of the individuals who engaged with the pastoral mountain cohort and learned to Sabbath was highly positive and encouraging. Several pastors expressed that they wish they had experienced something similar to this during seminary or when they first entered ministry. Others looked back at years of ministry and wish they had begun to keep the Sabbath earlier. The entire group concluded that they would seek to continue to practice the Sabbath in the future.

This is reassuring feedback, that my own life-changing experience keeping the Sabbath is applicable to others as well. Throughout the course of this work, I attempted to find an effective way to teach Sabbath to pastors, and to teach pastors to Sabbath. The data, in chapter one, demonstrated the need for the Sabbath as a spiritual discipline to both combat burnout and to remind a pastor of his or her identity as first and foremost in the Lord. There are significant theological foundations for keeping the Sabbath and its role in pointing Christians to the ultimate rest of our souls that is found in Christ. Several authors have contributed wonderful work to this topic, and their work provided substantial insight into how to teach others about this life-giving habit of a weekly Sabbath.

The goal of this project was to assemble a group of pastors, to take them to the mountains to learn about Sabbath, and to encourage them to implement this practice into their lives. I stated

at the beginning of this thesis-project that if just one pastor might avoid burnout and find greater satisfaction in at least one area of life, I would feel the project to be a success. Their overwhelmingly affirmative responses validate the nature of the project and establish valuable building blocks for future projects or trips to educate other pastors or lay people about this necessary spiritual discipline.

I will absolutely continue to recommend the Sabbath as one of the most important spiritual exercises that any pastor can practice for their own soul, that of their family, and as shepherds of God's flock. In my own ministry, I will continue to advocate for those I serve with to keep the Sabbath and I will seek to continue to lead groups of ministry leaders in pastoral cohorts to environments, such as the mountains, which will raise their awareness of their own limitations and of God's overwhelming glory. Jesus tells us, "The Sabbath was made for man," and we know that man is made in the image of God, for God, who chose to rest from His work of creation. We keep the Sabbath, one 24-hour period each week, to rest from our work and to remember God and what He has done.

APPENDIX 1

PASTORAL SATISFACTION & SABBATH QUESTIONNAIRE

Demographic Data

1) Age

18-24 / 25-34 / 35-44 / 45-54 / 55-64 / 65+

2) Sex

Male / Female

3) Marital Status

Single / Married / Divorced

4) Do you have any children?

Yes / No

Answering Yes led to section: Child Demographic Data

Answering No led to section: Church Data

Child Demographic Data

Age of Children (select all that apply)

Preschool / Elementary School / Middle School / High School / College/Young Adult

Church Data

1) Church Size (On an average Sunday, what is your church attendance)

2) Number of full-time paid Pastors / Ministry Staff (including you)

1 / 2-4 / 5-10 / 10-20 / 20+

3) Years at Current Church

Less than 1 year / 1-4 years / 5-10 / 11-15 / 16-25 / 25+

4) Years in Vocational Ministry

Less than 1 year / 1-4 years / 5-10 / 11-15 / 16-25 / 25+

Current Role at Church

Intern/Resident / Associate Minister/Pastor / Children's Minister/Pastor / Youth Minister/Pastor / Worship Minister/Pastor / Missions or Outreach Minister/Pastor / Senior or Lead Pastor / Executive Pastor / Chaplain / Military Chaplain

Level of Satisfaction

7-point Likert Scale with lowest, mid-point, and highest levels defined

Very Unsatisfied *Neither Satisfied Nor Unsatisfied* *Very Satisfied*

1) How satisfied are you in your current church/ministry context?

2) How satisfied are you in your personal time with God in prayer?

3) How satisfied are you in your personal time with God in the Bible?

4) How satisfied are you in your current relationship with God?

5) How satisfied are you in your relationships with your friends?

6) How satisfied are you in your relationships with church members?

7) How satisfied are you in your engagement with and attentiveness to your family?

8) How satisfied are you in your relationship with your spouse?

(If not married, consider your closest relationship)

9) How seriously are you considering leaving vocational ministry in the next year?

Very Seriously / Seriously / Potentially / Not Seriously / Not Considering At All

Sabbath Data

1) How often do you take a Sabbath, ie., one day set aside intentionally each week to rest from work/ministry?

I Don't / Rarely / Sometimes (Once per month) / Often (2-3 times per month) / Always (Weekly)

2) True or False: Someone taught me what a Sabbath is and what it looks like.

3) True or False: I believe a weekly Sabbath is important in my life and ministry.

APPENDIX 2

PASTORAL MOUNTAIN COHORT PRE-TRIP MEETING

SABBATH

Sabbath Seminar

- Each night around the campfire
- 1 hour (30/content, 30/discussion)

Sabbath Journal

- Challenge after the trip to practice a weekly Sabbath for 10 weeks
- Journal about it / let me check in with you / let me interview you at the end

Sabbath Seminars

- Monday: Rest
- Tuesday: Remember
- Wednesday: Recreation
- Thursday: Rhythm

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 12

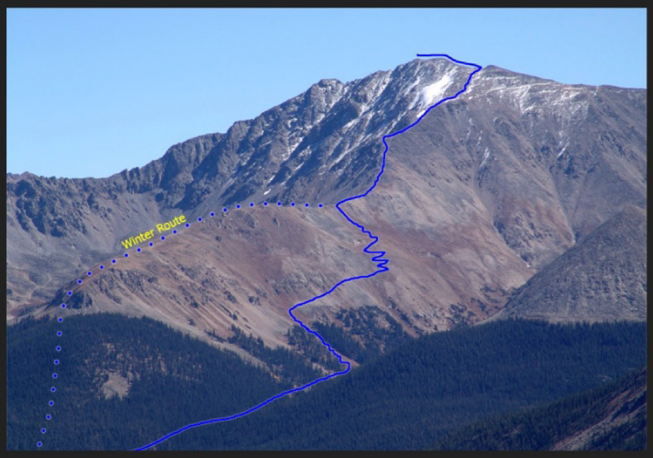
DAY 1 – FLY IN / GEAR UP / ACCLIMATIZE

- Fly into DIA / Retrieve Checked Bags / Pick Up Vehicles
- Drive to Golden, CO for Supplies from Whole Foods / Bentgate Mountaineering (Food, Fuel)
- Drive to Twin Lakes, CO - Lakeview Campground (2-hour drive)
- Set Up Camp / Settle In / Buy Water
- Explore Mt. Massive 4WD Trail
- Early Bedtime = Early Summit Attempt

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 13

DAY 2 – SUMMIT DAY: LA PLATA PEAK

- 14,336 feet
- 4,500 feet elevation gain / Class 2
- 9.25 miles RT
- Wake: 4:30am & Drive to TH
- Start: 5am (Sunrise: 6:30am)
- Expect an 8-10–hour Day (Sunset: 7:45pm)



WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 14

DAY 3 – SUMMIT DAY: MT. PRINCETON

- 14,197 feet
- 3,200 feet elevation gain / Class 2
- 6.5 miles RT
- Wake: 4:30am & Drive to TH
- Start: 6am (Sunrise: 6:30am)
- Expect an 8-hour Day

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 15

DAY 4 – SUMMIT DAY: MT. MASSIVE

- 14,427 feet (2nd tallest 14er in CO)
- 4,000 feet elevation gain / Class 2
- 7.5 miles RT
- Wake: 3:30am & Drive to TH
- Start: 5am (Sunrise: 6:30am)
- Expect an 8-hour Day

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 16

DAY 5 – DENVER & FLY HOME

- Sleep in
- Pack Up
- Drive to Denver
- Celebratory Beer
- Fly Home

SUMMIT STRATEGY

PACE / BREATHING / REST STEP

- Pace = 2 mile/hour

  50 min on / 10 off

  Pace Setting (Kevin / Scott / Michael)
- Pressure Breathing = Deep Inhale / Exhale w/ Pressure
- Rest Step = Ascending and Pausing w/ back leg fully extended & front leg bent

GEAR LIST

- Hiking Boots
- Day Pack
- Good Socks
- Clothing (Shorts / Top / Rain Jacket)
- Gloves
- Sunglasses / Buff / Hat
- Toiletries (Lip Balm, Sunscreen)
- Water Bottles (gift for crew) / Reservoirs
- Mountain Meals / Snacks
- Multi-Tool
- Headlamp
- Trekking Poles (Optional)
- Cooler
- Medical Kit
- Tents
- Sleeping Bag / Pad / Pillow
- Camp Chair
- Relaxing Clothes (Sandals, etc.)
- Camp Stove
- Meals (purchase in CO)
- Other amenities
- Loaner Items: Who needs what?

FOOD

Base Camp Food

- Sandwich Supplies / Chips / Tortillas / Sausages / Fruit / Beer / etc.
- Purchase in CO & Share

Mountain Meals

- Goal: Snack every hour (breaks) on Trail = 150-200 calories minimum
- Think: Protein - Carbs - Sugar

Mountain Meals

- Jerky, Trail Mix, Nuts, Fruit, Bars, Peanut Butter Packets, Candy Bars, Candy, etc.
- Diversity is Key
- Summit Bag = Breakfast Bar, Trail Mix, Jerky, Candy Bar, (2) PB Packets, Gummy Bears, Apple

WATER

Base Camp Water

- HYDRATE!
- .5-1 oz. / 1 lb. Body Weight per day

Summit Day Water

- Estimate 1L / 1.5 mile on Trail
- 6-8L Water per Summit
- (1-2) Reservoir + (2-4) 1L Nalgenes

SEPTEMBER 12-16

COLORADO 2022

APPENDIX 3

PASTORAL MOUNTAIN COHORT ITINERARY

Day 1 - Fly & Acclimatize (9/12)

- Fly to CO early

- Supplies in Golden

Groceries / Water / Fuel / Etc.

- Drive to Lake City Campsite (2 hrs / 15 min) Arrive by 1pm

- Lunch at Campsite

- Buy Water from Grocery Store (320L) (3.8L to 1 Gal) = 84 Gallons Water

- Check Out Mt. Massive (North Halfmoon Creek Trailhead) (45 min)

- Dinner @ Campsite

- Camp @ White Star Campground

Food

@ Airport

Sandwich at Campsite

Hobo Meals (Tin Foil Packs) at Campsite

Campsites

Whitestar Campground

Recreation.gov

Day 2 - Summit #1 (9/13)

La Plata Peak (14,336 ft)

9.25 miles / 4500 ft gain / Class 2

- Wake @ 3:30am

- Road by 4am (15 min)

- Arrive La Plata Peak Trailhead by 4:15am

- Sunrise @ 6:48am

- COMMUNION AT SUMMIT

- Expect an 8-10-hour day / Down no later than 3pm

- Leadville: Melanzana / Cubanos or BBQ

- Camp @ White Star Campground

Food

Breakfast on Trail

Sandwich at Campsite

Cubanos or BBQ in Leadville to Celebrate 1st Summit!

Day 3 - Summit #2 (9/14)

Mt. Princeton (14,197 ft)

7 miles / 3200 ft gain / Class 2

- Wake @ 3:45am

- Road by 4:15am

- Arrive Mt. Princeton Trailhead by 5am

- Sunrise @ 6:50am

- PSALM 8 SERVICE AT SUMMIT

- Expect a 6-8-hour day / Down by 1pm

- Lunch in Buena Vista

- Hang Out @ Twin Lakes / Sausage Wraps @ Campsite

- Camp @ White Star Campground

Food

On Trail

Biggies in Buena Vista

Sausage Wraps at Campsite

Day 4 - Summit #3 (9/15)

Mt. Massive (14,421 ft)

7.5 miles / 4000 ft gain / Class 2

- Wake @ 3:30am

- Road by 4am

- Arrive North Halfmoon Creek Trailhead by 5am

- Sunrise @ 6:49am

- PRAYER AT SUMMIT

- Expect a 7-9-hour day / Down by 2pm

- Hang out in Leadville / High Mountain Pies

- Camp @ White Star Campground

Day 5 – Fly Home (9/16)

- Wake naturally

- Pack up Campsite

- Drive to Denver

- Lunch

- Flights home

APPENDIX 4

SABBATH GUIDEBOOK

NIGHT 1: TEACHING SABBATH TO PASTORS – REST

Open with Prayer

Invite one of the Participants to Pray

Pass Out Journals

Question: How have the past 1-2 years in ministry felt for you?

How are you feeling? Stressed? Overworked? Energized? Why?

Introduction to Sabbath

Until 4 years ago, in my ministry career, I had typically taken Mondays as a "day off." But it was rarely a full day away from work. The desire to be efficient, to be known as a hard worker, to make the rest of the week easier, or to simply get things done, even to glorify God, often caused me to open my laptop and work a half day or more most Mondays. The few days I truly got away from work were often spent on inconsequential or even unhealthy things. Work crept into my evenings. Y'all, I was just always on my computer. I prided myself on quick email responses.

And the sad thing is, I felt justified in working so much. After all, the 4th Commandment (the Sabbath) is the only 1 of the 10 Commandments that I can think of a pastor being applauded for breaking. If I were to cheat on my spouse or be caught stealing – my ministry career would (or at least probably should) be over. In many churches, though, the idea of the pastor being always available, always at the church, always meeting with people is seen as an ideal – the perfect pastor.

This habitual work style led me to be a very productive pastor, but at the cost of my mental, physical, familial, and spiritual health. As I looked back on that first career decade, I found myself needing to repent of habits I had developed in the name of ministry and to seek a more balanced life. So I began to explore the issue of my personal practice of Sabbath and how to choose to rest.

So, I began a six-month process of committing to one day of rest, away from work and, in my case, away from the technological distractions of my cell phone and laptop. I chose to rest and practice a Sabbath every Sunday evening from roughly 5pm, when my Sunday "church day" ended, through Monday evening.

To say that the result of my experience of Sabbath was life-changing may sound melodramatic, but it is true. My marriage became healthier; my relationship with my children was stronger; my work didn't feel as crushing, and I felt more satisfied with my life, ministry, and faith. As I set aside one day a week for no other purpose than to rest, I found that my life began to feel different. The time I spent at work the other six days felt different. My time with my family felt different. And my relationship with God changed and reached a deeper level of trust and intimacy.

I think one of the reasons I had never taken the concept of a Sabbath seriously was because it sounds ultra-religious. I always thought the practice was reserved for orthodox Jews and Seventh-Day Adventists. It seemed to run counter to the culture of the Protestant Ethic in which I had been inculcated and to which, frankly, I am well-adjusted and well-suited. I thought Jesus trampled over the fourth commandment and so I followed suit. But through my recent study and experience of Sabbath, I have found the opposite to be true. With greater clarity, I now see that Sabbath rest is a principle that the healthiest, most well-respected, and long-tenured

pastors practice as a cornerstone of effective ministry. Rather than discovering something new, it seems like a veil has been lifted and I am now seeing something of great importance I had simply been ignoring.

So, Why Sabbath?

I've shared my personal experience around the Sabbath. Here's why I think it's important for pastors and ministry leaders. One of the most popular podcasts of the past few years was *The Rise & Fall of Mars Hill*. In one of the episodes, a former pastor of Mars Hill Church is lamenting and repenting of his time as a pastor and how he took advantage of those on staff (as well as volunteers). He said this: "We grind people down. Wear them out, grind them into dust. We make bread from their bones and then serve it to people as communion."

Question: Can anyone relate? Has anyone felt this way?

If you're willing to share or confess, please do.

Burnout & Pastoral Satisfaction

I think there's a reckoning that has started in the church because pastors have long been neglecting their own souls. More than ever, Exhaustion, anxiety, deep stress, marital issues, loneliness, hopelessness, anger, numbness, lack of satisfaction, fatigue, weariness, depression. Each of these can describe the inner turmoil that many pastors have experienced at some point in their career. A word that is often used to encompass all these feelings is burnout.

One pastor described his experience with burnout as feeling as if he was on a perpetual treadmill, constantly running further up and faster still, until his "ministry began to feel more like

a burden than a joy."[1] Another pastor described an emotional state where he began searching desperately for a new church, with little attention to theology or fit, because he was looking for a quick escape.[2]

A 2021 article in Christianity Today bore the headline "The Pastors Aren't All Right: 38% Consider Leaving Ministry." In it, the author, utilizing a Barna Group survey, revealed that the those 38% had been deeply affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and had experienced far greater stress and much less satisfaction in ministry in this difficult season.[3]

This isn't a new trend, and it doesn't just affect the pastor himself. A study in 2014 found that one third of pastors felt that ministry was an "outright hazard" to their families.[4] A 2016 study by the Francis Schaefer Institute reported that 77% of pastors felt that they did not have a good marriage and saw ministry as a key factor for their dissatisfaction.[5] Perhaps most shockingly, a 2021 poll of 345 pastors in 27 countries, occupying various roles, found that 12% had considered suicide in the past year.[6]

Question: Why do you think pastors are feeling this way?

You can work anywhere. So we work everywhere. There's spiritual warfare involved. There are lives and souls at stake. Ministry is hard.

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[1] Ed Moore, "I Was Burnt Out - And I Stayed In," *9Marks Journal*, no. Summer 2018 (2018), 9.
[2] Moore, "I Was Burnt Out"*, 9.*
[3] Kate Shellnutt, "The Pastors Aren't All Right: 38% Consider Leaving Ministry," *News & Reporting* (Christianity Today, November 16, 2021), last modified November 16, 2021, accessed November 18, 2021, https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2021/november/pastor-burnout-pandemic-barna-consider-leaving-ministry.html.
[4] Travis Collins, *For Ministers about to Start ... or about to Give Up* (Danvers: Travis Collins, 2014), 3.
[5] Richard J Krejcir, "Statistics on Pastors: 2016 Update," *ChurchLeadership.org* (Francis A. Schaeffer Institute of Church Leadership Development, 2016), last modified 2016, accessed January 11, 2022, http://www.churchleadership.org/apps/articles/default.asp?blogid=4545&view=post&articleid=Statistics-on-Pastors-2016-Update&link=1&fldKeywords=&fldAuthor=&fldTopic=0.
[6] Report. *2021 Pastoral Mental Health Report*. FaithLife Corporation, 2021.

However, there are biblical principles and practices that serve as more than just balm to cover wounds, in fact they may actually be the medicine for the soul. A healthy pastor is tasked with pointing people to God, reminding them of who He is and who they are because of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. In the same way, a pastor must be reminded of these truths himself, particularly that "we are not essential to the completion of God's task" in a person's life or in the world and that we are invited to join God in mission but not achieve it for Him.[7]

Sabbath Survey Data

This, I believe, is the importance of Sabbath. I collected data from a number of pastors/ministry leaders about their experience with Sabbath and here's what I learned….

71 respondents

16 – Always (Weekly) Sabbath

37 – Always/Often (2-3 times per month)

32 – No or Rarely

19 – No

The No/Rare Group (32 pastors)

On a 7-point Scale measuring Satisfaction:

3.53 Satisfaction w/ Church	4.41 Satisfaction w/ Friendships
4.07 Satisfaction w/ Prayer Life	3.72 Satisfaction w/ Church Members
4.09 Satisfaction w/ Time in Bible	4.47 Satisfaction w/ Attentiveness to Family
4.79 Satisfaction w/ Relationship w/ God	4.81 Satisfaction w/ Spouse

[7] David Rohrer, *The Sacred Wilderness of Pastoral Ministry* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 78.

Over 80% Potentially, Seriously, Very Seriously Considering Leaving Ministry

75% NOT taught to Sabbath

68% Sabbath is Important

The Always/Often Group (37)

On a 7-point Scale measuring Satisfaction, this group scored almost 2 full points higher in every single category:

5.73 Satisfaction w/ Church

5.14 Satisfaction w/ Friendships

5.46 Satisfaction w/ Prayer

5.30 Satisfaction w/ Church Members

5.51 Satisfaction w/ Bible

6.16 Satisfaction w/ Attentiveness to Family

5.89 Satisfaction w/ Relationship w/ God

6.41 Satisfaction w/ Spouse

Over 80% (Less than 20%) Not Seriously or Not Considering at All Leaving Ministry

55% Taught to Sabbath

100% Sabbath is Important

19 Respondents NO Sabbath / 11 Seriously or Very Seriously Considering Leaving Ministry

16 Respondents always Sabbath / 2 Seriously or Very Seriously Considering Leaving Ministry

My thesis: The problem isn't the presence of work, the problem is the absence of Rest.

Sabbath is one of the most important spiritual practices that reminds us of our limitations and of God's continued work in our lives and in the world. The practice of Sabbath, then, is instrumental in not only combatting pastoral burnout and contributing to a greater sense of satisfaction in life, but also transforming a pastor's view of who he is and what he is called to do.

What is Sabbath?

In the beginning, according to Genesis 1:1, God created the heavens and the earth—everything—from nothing. Day after creation day, He spoke the entire universe and everything it contains into existence. For 6 days, God creates. Then, we reach the 7th day.

Read Genesis 2:1-3

Ask Participant to Read

Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them.
And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done.
So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation.

The word Sabbath comes from the Hebrew word shabbat which means simply "to stop" or "to rest" and, significantly, God is the first person in the Bible to do this. After six full days of creating, God finishes the work He has been doing, and then He chooses to rest. Moreover, God blesses this day and makes it holy, sanctifying and setting it apart for Himself. Certainly, all the days of creation belong to Him, and yet this particular day is set aside as uniquely holy.
Dr. Richard Lowery asserts, "Sabbath is woven into the very fabric of the universe, the thread that holds the world together."[8]

There's actually nothing natural about the 7-day week that we still practice to this day. In fact, after the French Revolution, the new ruling party in France attempted to institute a 10-day work week. 10 on, 1 or 2 off. Within months this led to chaos, exhaustion, suicide, murder, until

[8] Richard H Lowery, "Sabbath, a 'Little Jubilee,'" Christian Reflection (Baylor University, 2002), https://www.baylor.edu/ifl/christianreflection/SabbatharticleLowery.pdf, 13.

the program was called off. The point is, there's something inherent to the 7-day week that we often take for granted.

So, the seventh day is the day that God Himself rested. Creation itself rested. What about us? The Biblical Command for Sabbath Rest first appears in Exodus. In both Exodus 16:22-30 and Exodus 20:8-11, the Sabbath is instituted as a day set apart as holy for the purpose of Rest. The people are called to rest because God rested.

The first mention of Sabbath in Exodus occurs after the Israelites are rescued from slavery in Egypt, but before the giving of the Commandments on Sinai. One month after leaving Egypt, God begins providing manna for His people to eat in the wilderness, and in Exodus 16 Moses gives these instructions.

Read Exodus 16:22-30

Ask Participant to Read

On the sixth day, they gathered twice as much—two omers for each person—and the leaders of the community came and reported this to Moses. He said to them, "This is what the Lord commanded: 'Tomorrow is to be a day of sabbath rest, a holy sabbath to the Lord. So bake what you want to bake and boil what you want to boil. Save whatever is left and keep it until morning.'" So they saved it until morning, as Moses commanded, and it did not stink or get maggots in it. "Eat it today," Moses said, "because today is a sabbath to the Lord. You will not find any of it on the ground today. Six days you are to gather it, but on the seventh day, the Sabbath, there will not be any." Nevertheless, some of the people went out on the seventh day to gather it, but they found none. Then the Lord said to Moses, "How long will you refuse to keep my commands and my instructions? Bear in mind that the Lord has given you the Sabbath; that is why on the sixth day he gives you bread for two

days. Everyone is to stay where they are on the seventh day; no one is to go out." So the people rested on the seventh day.

This passage offers the first set of biblical instructions for how the people of God are to keep the Sabbath holy. Moses gives specific guidelines for gathering manna during the first six days of the week, which mirrors God's creative work in creation, and then prohibits gathering on the seventh day. Additionally, God will not provide manna on the seventh day; instead, a double portion is given on the sixth day. Most importantly, Moses says that "The Lord has given you the Sabbath." This is language that clearly demonstrates a gift of rest rather than a burden of a law.

At this point in Exodus, God has not given His people the Ten Commandments. Obedience to God in keeping the Sabbath day by stopping and resting on it demonstrates faith and trust in His commitment to Israel. The people are able to rest because of their faith in a God who also rested, and who provides all they need.

After this, four chapters later in Exodus, God gives His people the Ten Commandments.

Read Exodus 20:8-11

Ask Participant to Read

"Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

Walter Brueggemann points out that this Sabbath command gets "the most airtime at the mountain," and would have shocked God's people, who were used to a life of slavery in Egypt.[9] The mandate to rest is now made law in Exodus 20, and it establishes a new pattern and rhythm of life for a people who had little or no idea of what it meant to rest.

At Sinai the Sabbath is tied directly back to creation. Exodus 20:11 reminds the people that God crafted the universe in six days and rested on the seventh, blessing that day and making it holy. Part of what is included in the Sabbath command, then, is a "positive theology of work" which demonstrates that rest is not an escape from something negative but a fulfillment of that which can also be good.[10] God worked, then He rested. So, too, human beings are commanded to work and rest.

The Sabbath is a day set apart, originally sanctified in Genesis 2. Mankind is invited to participate in the Sabbath, starting in Exodus 16. It is then codified for God's people in Exodus 20. And the command to keep the Sabbath continues throughout the Old Testament.

Jesus & Sabbath

But what about the New Testament? What about the New Covenant? Doesn't Jesus effectively do away with all of the Sabbath commands? Actually, Jesus is clear in the Sermon on the Mount when He declares that He is not doing away with the Old Testament laws, He is the fulfillment of them (Matt. 5:17). Thus Old Testament commands aren't irrelevant. They either pointed to Christ, take on new or renewed dimensions, or both.

[9] Walter Brueggemann, *Sabbath as Resistance* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014), 27.
[10] Gerald A Klingbeil, "The Sabbath Law in the Decalogue(s): Creation and Liberation as a Paradigm for Community," *Revue Biblique* 117, no. 4 (December 4, 2010): 491-509, 501.

According to the Pharisees, though, Jesus disobeyed the Sabbath command, egregiously and consistently, by healing sick people. In Matthew, Jesus heals a man with a withered hand in a synagogue (Matt. 12:9-14). In the Gospel of Mark, Jesus casts out a demon (Mark 1:21-28), heals Peter's mother-in-law (Mark 1:29-31) and a man with a lame hand in a synagogue (Mark 3:1-6). In Luke, Jesus heals a crippled woman in a synagogue (Luke 13:10-17) as well as a man in the home of a Pharisee (Luke 14:1-6). And finally, in John's Gospel, Jesus heals a paralyzed man at the pool of Bethesda (John 5:1-18) as well as a blind beggar on the streets of Jerusalem (John 9:1-16).

Each of these acts of healing was intentionally provocative: performed in front of a crowd, often including religious leaders, and typically accompanied with a question about what is right and good to do on the Sabbath. Jesus' brashness in healing on the Sabbath actually became one of the primary motivations for His enemies to conspire to kill Him (John 5:18). However, what Jesus was breaking was not the biblical command to Sabbath but rather the religious traditions that had grown up around the Sabbath commandment.

What is at stake between Jesus and the religious leaders of his day is most clearly revealed in a Sabbath episode recorded by all three synoptic Gospels. Matthew 12:1-8, Mark 2:23-28, and Luke 6:1-5 each relate the incident of Jesus and His disciples walking through a grain field on a Sabbath day. Matthew tells us that the disciples were hungry, and all three Gospel writers share that the disciples began to pick heads of grain and eat them.

When confronted by Pharisees who witness this so-called harvesting of grain, an illegal activity on the Sabbath, Jesus defends His disciples by providing a biblical context for what they are doing and then issuing a theological pronouncement about His authority. First, Jesus compares the disciples' act of eating grain to David and his companions eating consecrated bread

(1 Sam. 21:1-6). In Matthew's account, he also equates what the disciples are doing to what the priests did in the Temple, working on the Sabbath by offering sacrifices (Num. 28:9-10).

Then, Jesus goes further and He proclaims Himself "Lord of the Sabbath" (Matt 12:8, Mark 2:28, Luke 6:5). Jesus challenges the legalistic traditions around the day of rest and asserts Himself as the overseer of the Sabbath as its true master. And in Mark 2:28, Jesus declares: **"The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath."**

Jesus doesn't disavow the Sabbath. He actually affirms the sacredness of it and restores it to its true intent. Jesus refuses to agree with the Pharisees that eating grain in a field is a violation of the Sabbath, offering instead a more biblical understanding of what it means to keep the day holy. By declaring the Sabbath made for man, Jesus ties it back to creation as something that God made, as well as to liberation from slavery as a mode of rest. The Sabbath is a day of rest for the benefit of human beings, which is why Jesus has no issue in healing sick people on the Sabbath or with hungry people eating.

Jesus even offers himself as the ultimate place of rest in Matthew 11:28-30, this passage appears right before Jesus declares himself Lord of the Sabbath.

Read Matthew 11:28-30

Ask Participant to Read

"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest...

God sees His people, as they were in Egypt, burdened and "heavy-laden," but this time the slave-masters are those who claim to speak for God, the teachers of Israel. The weight of keeping all the Law has become burdensome; even the fourth commandment, to rest, has become difficult and a load to carry rather than a relief. But Jesus has come to fulfill the purpose of the Sabbath in its deepest, most spiritual sense.

Hebrews 4 tells Christians that there is a "Sabbath rest for the people of God" (Heb. 4:9) who can rest from their work just as God did from His (Heb. 4:10). By entering God's rest, Christians (and pastors!) can cease their activity of trying to attain righteousness for themselves or others and, instead, take on the yoke and rest of Jesus, the Lord of Sabbath and, therefore, the Lord of rest. The commandment doesn't change but rather takes on a new dimension. The Sabbath is still intended as a day to rest, it's a day set apart to be a people set apart.

REST

So, how can you begin to implement Sabbath in your life? Here are some keys:

- Take 1 day off from work each week (24-hour continuous period)

It does not need to be Sunday! In fact, maybe it shouldn't be.

I personally take Sunday at 5pm – Monday at 5pm.

- No Work = No work emails, no work conversations, no work preparation

Avoid Activities that are work-adjacent

- Rest = Sleep / Nap – The idea of a Sabbath Nap is part of Jewish tradition

- Spend time with family, with your wife, not doing chores, but just being together

- Trust God = Spend time with Him

When I think of Sabbath, I often think of it as an island in my busy week. Or, as the great songwriter Bob Dylan wrote, a shelter from the storm:

> I was burned out from exhaustion, buried in the hail
>
> Poisoned in the bushes and blown out on the trail

Hunted like a crocodile, ravaged in the corn

Come in, she said, I'll give ya shelter from the storm

Shelter from the Storm by Bob Dylan

I'm excited to go on this journey with y'all. Tomorrow we'll talk about the Sabbath command to Remember. On Wednesday we'll cover what to Do on your Sabbath. And Thursday we'll close with How to implement Sabbath with some clear principles.

Pass Out Gift Book: *24/6* by Dr. Matthew Sleeth

Feel free to save for home or read while we're here.

Questions for Discussion

1) Is anyone already taking a consistent weekly Sabbath? Tell us about your experience.

2) Has anyone taken it in the past? If so, why do you continue or why did you stop?

3) What prevents you from taking a weekly Sabbath?

4) What will be the most difficult thing to stop doing with work?

5) What does REST look like for you?

6) How does this sound? Reasonable? Biblical? Doable?

7) What is the 24-hour period of time will you choose to take a weekly Sabbath?

Close with Prayer

Invite one of the Participants to Pray

NIGHT 2: TEACHING SABBATH TO PASTORS – REMEMBER

Communion Service on Summit of La Plata Peak (earlier in day)

Open with Prayer

Invite one of the Participants to Pray

Question: Yesterday we talked about REST. Any insights into Rest from your day today?

Any thoughts on Sabbath you'd like to share? How has "being away" been?

Sabbath Commandment: Rest & Remember

The Sabbath was given as a gift of REST. It's also given as a sign to REMEMBER. The Sabbath ordinance was given as a law and a sign between God and His people of the special covenant relationship they were invited into. The Israelites are now set apart just as the Sabbath day is set apart, and by observing one day of the week as different from the rest, the people are reminded of this deep truth.

Two primary passages demonstrate the Sabbath command to remember Israel's status as God's chosen people. The first, Exodus 31:12-17, defines the Sabbath day as a sign to God's people that they have been sanctified and are now a part of a covenant relationship forever. Additionally, punishment for breaking the Sabbath is instituted, amplifying the seriousness not only of the day but of the identity of God's chosen people.

Read Exodus 31:12-17

Ask Participant to Read

And the Lord said to Moses, "You are to speak to the people of Israel and say, 'Above all you shall keep my Sabbaths, for this is a sign between me and you throughout your

generations, that you may know that I, the Lord, sanctify you. You shall keep the Sabbath, because it is holy for you. Everyone who profanes it shall be put to death. Whoever does any work on it, that soul shall be cut off from among his people. Six days shall work be done, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of solemn rest, holy to the Lord. Whoever does any work on the Sabbath day shall be put to death. Therefore the people of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, observing the Sabbath throughout their generations, as a covenant forever. It is a sign forever between me and the people of Israel that in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested and was refreshed.'"

In Exodus 16, gathering food on the Sabbath was met with a reprimand accompanied by a reminder of the purpose of the day of rest. In Exodus 31, however, the penalty for working on the Sabbath is the death penalty. The threat of capital punishment is repeated twice in these six verses, magnifying the peril of disobedience. While the shift in tone toward punishment seems drastic, Exodus 31 affirms the same Sabbath principles as the previous passages, grounding the command in God's creation and commanding people to rest because God rested. But the new language of a death sentence for noncompliance is accompanied by the grander motif of the covenant between God and the Israelites. God declares that an important reason to keep the Sabbath holy is because it is a sign for the current and future generations that God has "sanctified" His creation.[11] God sanctified one day of the week and now He tells the people that they also are set apart for a special covenant relationship with the creator of the universe. The Sabbath does not lose its connection to creation, but instead takes on a new layer of meaning as a reminder between God and Israel of their covenantal bond.

[11] Childs, *The Book of Exodus,* 416.

While the Sabbath of creation is for all human beings, the Sabbath is also decreed as an intentional sign for a specific people group. As Tilden Edwards insightfully suggests, "the creation story is particularized into the creation of a people."[12] God is the grand sanctifier, both of a day on the cosmic scale as well as of a people group on an earthly level. The Sabbath command is part of "an ongoing process of development in obedience" as God continues to sanctify and consecrate His people for Himself.[13]

Also, in Exodus 31:17, for the first time, the Scriptures indicate that on the day God rested, He was refreshed. The Hebrew word used in this verse means "to take a breath," and it is the same one used in Exodus 23 to refer to the refreshment of slaves and foreigners on the Sabbath. The language of breathing connotes a rhythm, an exhale and an inhale, creation and cessation, work and rest. The people of God are commanded to enter into that same rhythm or risk being cut off from the relationship which gives them air to breathe in the first place. So, Sabbath rest is not simply for rest but for transformation, as God has sanctified and continues to sanctify His people through this rhythm.[14]

The second passage that calls Israel to remember its new identity as God's chosen people occurs when Moses restates the Law in the book of Deuteronomy. Mark Buchanan suggests that while Genesis and Exodus look to creation as the groundwork for Sabbath rest, "Deuteronomy grounds it in liberation."[15]

Read Deuteronomy 5:12-15

Ask Participant to Read

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[12] Tilden Edwards, *Sabbath Time* (Nashville: Upper Room Books, 1992), 21.
[13] "The Sabbath," *The Next Faithful Step* (Fuller Seminary, 2022), last modified 2022, accessed April 12, 2022, https://www.fuller.edu/next-faithful-step/resources/sabbath/.
[14] Brueggemann, *Sabbath as Resistance*, 45.
[15] Mark Buchanan, *The Rest of God* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 2006), 87.

"'Observe the Sabbath day, to keep it holy, as the Lord your God commanded you. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter or your male servant or your female servant, or your ox or your donkey or any of your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates, that your male servant and your female servant may rest as well as you. You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the Lord your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day.

When Moses reiterates the Ten Commandments in Deuteronomy, the fourth commandment remains largely the same; but there are also subtle differences that demonstrate the Sabbath as an identity-shaping command for God's people. The stated reason for Sabbath observance here, for the first time, is not to rest because God rested after creation but to remember Israel's history of slavery in Egypt and that it was God who rescued them. Tim Keller refers to the Sabbath as a "reenactment of the emancipation from slavery."[16] As the Israelites are standing on the precipice of entering their Promised Land, a physical place set apart for them, Moses reminds them of the Ten Commandments and their personal history. The language here reminds the people, who were not even a full generation removed from Egypt, of their experience as slaves. The people of God can rest because their identity has been transformed and they are no longer slaves.

The Sabbath is woven throughout Israel's history, from creation in the book of Genesis, through the wilderness of Exodus to Mt. Sinai and then, in Deuteronomy, to the doorstep of the

[16] Keller, "The Power of Deep Rest."

Promised Land. God set one day apart, sanctifying it, and He did the same for the Israelites, sanctifying them. The Sabbath is a day set apart for a people who have been set apart.

And in Christ, the Lord of the Sabbath, we are invited into this covenant sign of the Sabbath as a people who have been set apart. We also have been liberated from slavery – ours to sin and death. We are also called to remember who God is and what He has done in our personal history. We Sabbath because God Sabbathed. His work of creation was finished on the 7th day. On a grander scale, God also purchased rest on our behalf when He finished the work of salvation on the cross. Remember, Jesus said: "It is finished"

Read Colossians 2:16-17

Ask Participant to Read

Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ.

The Apostle Paul labels the Sabbath a shadow of the reality that has come to us in Christ. The shadow of physical weekly rest symbolizes the reality of a deeper spiritual rest that is accomplished by Jesus on our behalf.

So, on the Sabbath, we are called to REMEMBER. And I think, as Christians, as pastors, we are called to remember 2 things:

1) Remember What God Has Done

2) Remember Who You Are In Christ

When we do this, we remind ourselves who we are on a cosmic scale. As pastors it's so tempting to believe that we are necessary. To God, to our church, to the ministry. Eugene Peterson actually says the opposite is true – that we are unnecessary to what we think is essential,

that we're the ones holding our congregations together and that we're unnecessary to what our church insists that we must accomplish.[17] The only thing that is necessary is Christ Himself.

In other words, "We are not essential to the completion of God's task, we have been invited by God to participate in His work. Our job is to give witness to God's work, not to accomplish it on His behalf."[18]

Karl Barth contended for the importance of Sabbath as a continued practice for Christians, and pastors. He called it "a continually recurring interruption" to the work of ministry which is a reminder that time on Earth is too limited to be focused solely on temporal matters but must instead be devoted to pursuing the things of God.[19] Because time to work is limited by a once-a-week day of rest, a Christian must trust God to continually work out His plan for the world. As pastors we are called to participate and play a small part in this work, but our contribution is, necessarily, limited.

Question: How does this strike you?

Do you feel like there's too much work to be done to rest?

How could Sabbath help you remember your place in God's work?

One last thought on what we're to remember on the Sabbath. Author, Mandy Smith, argues that Sabbath is an intentional reminder of our impending death.[20] Remembering that we are not God is a reminder that we are going to die. She calls the Sabbath an opportunity to practice your death in two ways:

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[17] Marva J. Dawn and Eugene H. Peterson, *The Unnecessary Pastor: Rediscovering the Call* (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2000), 2-4.
[18] David Rohrer, *The Sacred Wilderness of Pastoral Ministry: Preparing a People for the Presence of the Lord* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 78.
[19] Karl Barth and J. Marks, *Karl Barth Church Dogmatics*, ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance, trans. A. T. McKay et al. (New York: T & T Clark International, 2004), 47-72.
[20] Mandy Smith, *Unfettered: Imagining a Childlike Faith beyond the Baggage of Western Culture* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2021), 27.

1) To get used to being in God's presence for the pure sake of it (as in Heaven) and

2) To learn to trust He can carry the world without us (as He will do after we're gone)

REMEMBER

- Read the Bible (but NOT for Work!)

Dane Ortlund calls it the "Defining Habit" and says: "Accept and embrace the truth that you will go deeper with Christ no further than you go into Scripture."[21]

Avoid Passages/Texts that may be work-adjacent

Try the Psalms, Wisdom literature

- Spend time in Mediation / Contemplative Prayer

- Spend time Journaling

- Pray the Sabbath Kiddush (Jewish prayer/blessing)

"Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the Universe. You have commanded us to observe the Sabbath and keep it holy."

1) Remember What God Has Done

2) Remember Who You Are In Christ

Theodore Roosevelt was President of the United States at the turn of the 20th century at a time when street lights and electricity had yet to make light pollution an issue. Whenever Teddy had dignitaries or foreign ambassadors or friends spend the night at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, after dinner, he had this custom of taking his guests onto the grounds of the White House and having them stand and look up at the night sky.

[21] Dane C. Ortlund, *Deeper: Real Change for Real Sinners* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2021), 151.

He'd point out different constellations and stars – distant, burning, beautiful specks of light, billions upon billions of miles away. Then, Teddy would stop talking, and they'd stand there in silence. He'd keep people out much too late, staring UP into the Heavens for so long, many would sit or even lay down. But he would keep looking up.

Then, after some time, Teddy would softly say to his guests –

"Gentlemen, I think we're all small enough now. Let's go to bed."

When we practice the Sabbath, we're reminded that we're Small. And when you know your Smallness, you're able to go to bed, you're able to truly Rest – in a Big God.

Tomorrow we'll get more into the logistics of what a Sabbath looks like, specifically what are some healthy, life-giving things to Do on your Sabbath. And Thursday we'll close with How to implement Sabbath with some clear principles.

Questions for Discussion

1) Today we took communion together – an ordinance of faith that Jesus gave us. How could the Sabbath, like communion, help us to Remember Jesus?

2) What are ways you could use the Sabbath to Remember who God is and what He has done?

3) What are ways you could spend the Sabbath Remembering who you are in Christ?

4) Ideas on how to spend time with God in the Bible and not make it about work?

Close with Prayer

Invite one of the Participants to Pray

NIGHT 3: TEACHING PASTORS TO SABBATH – RECREATION

Psalm 8 Devotional on Summit of Mt. Princeton (earlier in day)

Open with Prayer

Invite one of the Participants to Pray

Question: We've talked about Sabbath as a day set apart to REST & REMEMBER…

What are some things you feel like you could DO on the Sabbath?

List some activities you feel would be life-giving on the Sabbath.

Read: Mark 6:31

Ask Participant to Read

And he said to them, "Come away by yourselves to a desolate place and rest a while." For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat.

How to Sabbath: RECREATION

Author Mark Buchanan says the Sabbath is both a "day and an attitude," a specific time each week and a disposition of the heart that is founded on the rest of God. Sabbath rest is a rest of mind and body, but also soul, because it is precipitated by trust and reliance on God, the giver of true rest. Because followers of Christ are spiritually rooted and hold to a conviction that God is sovereign and good, participants in a day of Sabbath rest can put their trust in Him to do what they cannot.[22]

[22] Buchanan, *The Rest of God,* 63.

This is not a far-flung hope that God will miraculously accomplish things at work or in the church outside of human activity. Instead, it is a deep trust in God's sovereignty that allows the people of God to relinquish the need for control or power and find identity in God Himself.[23] For pastors, the pressure of ministry can be overwhelming because the ministry itself is such a strong connection point to the work of God. True Sabbath rest, though, allows a pastor to "relax without guilt" because he knows that he is not God.[24] This soul-shaping aspect of Sabbath-keeping is integral to a high view of God and an appropriate view of human work, even ministry.

One specific way to practice Sabbath-keeping is to stop doing things for work and start doing things for recreation. Buchanan calls this the "Golden Rule" of Sabbath – to cease doing what is necessary and do something life-giving or "re-creating" for the soul.[25]

Tim Keller refers to "avocational time" on the Sabbath, doing something meaningful that is not part of a daily routine or work schedule.[26] So what might be work for someone else could be Sabbath recreation for you (fishing, working on your car, mowing your lawn, etc.) The point is, the Sabbath isn't just about doing nothing or going into a trance-like state to meditate on God. In his book, *The Common Rule*, Justin Whitmel Earley says, "Our souls need more than to do. They need to do restful things."[27]

So, what does Recreation on the Sabbath look like? Here are some ideas, things that have been recreative and restful in my life:

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[23] Buchanan, *The Rest of God,* 62.
[24] Buchanan, *The Rest of God,* 51.
[25] Buchanan, *The Rest of God,* 128-129.
[26] Timothy Keller, "Redeemer Report," Six Ways to Practice Sabbath, March 2018, https://www.redeemer.com/redeemer-report/article/six_ways_to_practice_sabbath.
[27] Justin Whitmel Earley, *The Common Rule: Habits of Purpose for an Age of Distraction* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2019), 149.

RECREATION

- Spend Time Outdoors

Pastor John Piper says: "If we would see the glory of God, we must rest." When Jesus said, "Come away by yourselves to a desolate (wild, wilderness) place and rest a while (Mark 6:31) I think he was also speaking to us. Charles Spurgeon recommended breathing country air and letting the beauty of nature work in the human soul as part of Sabbath.[28]

Wayne Muller, in his book on Sabbath, wrote that almost every person he spoke to about Sabbath said that "time in nature is essential – it is singularly the most nourishing, healing Sabbath practice."[29] Go fishing. Go for a hike. Take a Sabbath walk. Spend time outside.

- Exercise

Go for a run. Spend time in or on the water. Rest from work by engaging your body and mind in a way that you can't the other six days of the week.

- Cook / Eat Good Food

The Sabbath Feast in Jewish culture was one of the familial rhythms and customs of each Friday evening. Try a recipe that takes longer, gather the ingredients, spend longer cooking and then enjoy it with your family. Make a habit of eating your favorite food on the Sabbath – go to that burger spot, BBQ joint, pizza place, etc. – maybe not every week but the 1st Sabbath of the month.

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[28] John Piper, Brothers, We Are Not Professionals: A Plea to Pastors for Radical Ministry (Nashville: B & H Publishing Group, 2013), 188.
[29] Wayne Muller, *Sabbath: Finding Rest, Renewal, and Delight in Our Busy Lives* (New York: Bantam Books, 1999), 80.

- Enjoy Music

Listen to good music. Sit and listen to an entire record. Write music. Play music, just to play it. Practice an instrument (avocationally).

- Create / Be Creative

Write, draw, paint, build, garden, mow, weed-eat, craft.

- Read

Read for pleasure! No books on church growth or leadership or discipleship or even Christian living. Read about history, read fiction, read without trying to curate illustrations. Read for fun.

- Include Your Spouse/Family/Friends

In any and of these activities, find ways to include your spouse, family, friends. If you're an introvert, maybe your Sabbath is more alone-time. If you're an extrovert, maybe it's more time with people who are life-giving.

- Have Sex With Your Spouse

"The Talmud prescribes the Sabbath as a time for making love."[30] Certain Jewish rabbinical guidelines include an injunction that married people should have sex on the Sabbath.[31] And in his highly-popular book, *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry,* John Mark Comer also offers sexual intimacy as a healthy aspect of observing the Sabbath.[32]

Conclusion

The point of Recreation on the Sabbath is not to fill your calendar with non-work activities. The Sabbath is intended for us to rest and remember. And true rest, in Christ, allows us

[30] Wayne Muller, *Sabbath,* 150.
[31] Marva Dawn, *Keeping the Sabbath Wholly* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1989), 192.
[32] John Mark Comer, *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry* (Colorado Springs: WaterBrook, 2019), 175.

to do things with our time that are beneficial to our souls, our mind, our body, our relationships. "On Sabbath, we get to enjoy and delight in creation and its gifts."[33]

Sabbath is Rest. And the one-day-a-week observance is just a taste of the deep divine rest we need in Jesus. The movie *Chariots of Fire* was based on the true story of two sprinters in the 1924 Paris Olympics. One of them, Eric Liddell, was a Christian, and when he learned the final race would take place on a Sunday, his Sabbath, he chose not to run. As a result he lost the chance for a gold medal in a race he was favored to win. The other runner is a man named Harold Abrahams, was a Jewish runner and even though he ends up winning the race, he still doesn't seem content with himself, with life, with anything.

Because Abrahams ran out of a need to prove himself. At one point, speaking of the 100m race he's about to run, he says, "I've got ten seconds to justify my existence."

Question: Does that sound like you? Do you relate to this in how you look at ministry?

Eric Liddell, on the other hand, was more than content to not run because he was able to be content, knowing a God who had already accepted him. That's why he tells his sister earlier in the movie, "God made me fast, and when I run I feel His pleasure."

Tim Keller talks about this movie and says that Harold Abrahams was weary even when he rested, and Eric Liddell was rested even when he as exerting himself.[34] Why? Because there's a work underneath our work that we really need rest from. It's the work of self-justification. Most of us work and work trying to prove ourselves, to convince God, others and ourselves that we are good people. That work is never over unless we rest in the Gospel.

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[33] Peter Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 157.
[34] Timothy Keller, *Jesus the King: Understanding the Life and Death of the Son of God* (New York: Penguin Books, 2011), 43.

At the end of His great act of creation, the Lord said, "It is finished," and He could rest. On the cross at the end of His great act of redemption, Jesus said, "It is finished!" So, now we can rest. If you rely on Jesus' finished work, you know that God is satisfied with you. You can be satisfied with life. You can take all the Sabbaths in the world, but if you don't have deep rest of the soul, resting in what Jesus did on the cross, you will not truly rest.

Questions for Discussion

(Questions 1-4 adapted from *Emotionally Healthy Leader* by Pete Scazzero[35] & *Sacred Rhythms* by Ruth Haley Barton[36]

1) What do you currently do that nurtures your spirit?

2) What people, places, activities do you need to avoid for you to rest and remember?

3) What activities bring you delight and nurture your spirit?

4) What requirements of your current season of life impact what you might do on the Sabbath?

5) Imagine the next two Sabbaths when you get home, what are 2-3 activities of Recreation you want to incorporate into those days of Rest?

Close in Prayer

Invite one of the Participants to Pray

[35] Peter Scazzero, *The Emotionally Healthy Leader: How Transforming Your Inner Life Will Deeply Transform Your Church, Team, and the World* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), 138.
[36] Ruth Haley Barton, *Sacred Rhythms: Arranging Our Lives for Spiritual Transformation* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 145.

NIGHT 4: TEACHING PASTORS TO SABBATH – RHYTHM

Prayer Time on Summit of Mt. Massive (earlier in day)

Open with Prayer

Invite one of the Participants to Pray

Question: Has this time in creation, away from work and home, climbing mountains and learning about Sabbath been beneficial to you?

Has this pastoral mountain cohort been helpful/impactful?

Read Psalm 46:10

Ask Participant to Read

"Be still, and know that I am God.

How to Sabbath: Find Your Rhythm

The key to practicing the Sabbath well is to incorporate it into your natural rhythm of life. It can't be an outlier to your week, it has to be a normal part of your week. Rhythm is crucial to a healthy life. "The rhythm of Jesus' life was rest and work…He regularly retreated to the outdoors for renewal and conversation with the Father. He routinely took his disciples into the wilderness."[37] We're made to life in season, with rhythm. In her book, *You're Only Human,* Kelly Kapic says, "Ignoring our need for such a pattern of rest means that we are functionally pretending to be the Creator and Sustainer."[38]

[37] Ashley Denton, *Christian Outdoor Leadership* (Fort Collins: Smooth Stone Publishing, 2011), 23.
[38] Kelly M. Kapic, *You're Only Human: How Your Limits Reflect God's Design and Why That's Good News* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2022), 221.

To make Sabbath a part of a weekly rhythm means instituting a new habit. Habits are so important to us. Brushing our teeth in the morning, the cup of coffee in the car, the parking spot we like, the HEB we go to, drop off and pick up of kids. Habits form so much of our lives. And that's the truth about habits. You form the habit, consciously or unconsciously, and eventually the habit forms you.[39] Some habits are not healthy. Smoking, stress-eating, pornographic addiction, chewing fingernails, looking at the phone while driving, and more. The point is that we form habits, which in turn form us. And there are habits of rest, such as the Sabbath, which will form our character over time.[40]

Challenge: Establish a Sabbath Habit

So here's the challenge for you as we prepare to come down from the mountains. I'm asking you, as a group, to commit to 10 weeks of practicing the Sabbath (one full 24-hour period) where you Rest, Remember, and seek Recreation. The Sabbath can't just be a once a month thing or it becomes too easily ignored or forgotten. Even every other week isn't a rhythm, and it will eventually be supplanted by the needs of work or home. Establish a once-a-week Sabbath for the next 10 weeks.

Start here – pick the day and then communicate it to the people around you. Let people know, "I'm going to be taking my Sabbath from Sunday afternoon through Monday afternoon or all-day Friday or Friday through Saturday." Whatever it is for you, by notifying your spouse, your staff, your church, your family, your friends, you'll be more likely to establish the habit and less likely to have it infringed upon by those close to you.

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[39] Justin Whitmel Earley, *The Common Rule*, 7.
[40] Tish Harrison Warren, *Liturgy of the Ordinary: Sacred Practices in Everyday Life* (Downer's Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2016), 141.

Also, by telling others about your Sabbath, you can create a culture of Sabbath, in your family, at your church, Moreover, you can create accountability for observing the Sabbath, something this cohort can also be a part of.

Question: When will your Sabbath day be? Who do you need to notify about it?

Rhythm & Rituals

I found what Mandy Smith says about rhythm to be insightful. She says, "A rhythm doesn't dictate the entire piece of music, it creates a consistent framework on which music can be made."[41] She then points to Rituals as things that provide a stable framework of rhythm in our lives. If you are averse to the term ritual or feel it's too legalistic or religious, think of the habits in life that are part of your day or week that, without them, you would feel off or as if something was missing. **Question: What are some of your daily or weekly rituals?**

Sabbath Rituals

Here then, are some ideas and suggestions for Sabbath Rituals:

- Light 2 Candles

The two purposes of Sabbath to Rest & Remember can be part of your ritual of lighting two candles to initiate the start of your Sabbath.

- Say a Sabbath Prayer

Light the candles and pray the Kiddush – "Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the Universe. You have commanded us to observe the Sabbath and keep it holy." It doesn't have to be the Kiddush, but pray an intentional prayer at the beginning and ending of your Sabbath Day

[41] Mandy Smith, *The Vulnerable Pastor: How Human Limitations Empower Our Ministry* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 141.

- Intentional Breathing

Try intentional breathing practices. Find time each Sabbath to spend even just one minute focused on your breathing. Wayne Muller says, "Simply return your awareness to the breath. Silently note each inhale or exhale."[42] Breathing is a great rhythm-establishing activity.

- Psalm 46 Meditation

Dr. Matthew Sleeth has a favorite prescription for how to practice the Sabbath. He describes the following practice of "subtracting one word at a time from Psalm 46:10" to help initiate the Sabbath and begin a time of rest.[43]

Be still, and know that I am God.

Be still, and know that I am.

Be still, and know that I.

Be still, and know that.

Be still, and know.

Be still, and.

Be still.

Be.

- Make a Sabbath List

Peter Scazzero talks about a "Protective Container" of rules and limits around Sabbath. The point is, you'll need to experiment with your Sabbath, try new things, see what works and what doesn't. But making a list can help make your Sabbath intentional. For example, "On Sabbath I will… / On Sabbath, I will not…"[44]

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[42] Wayne Muller, *Sabbath, 75.*
[43] Sleeth, *24/6*, 157.
[44] Peter Scazzero, *The Emotionally Healthy Leader: How Transforming Your Inner Life Will Deeply Transform Your Church, Team, and the World* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), 167-168.

Rhythm & Technology

One final thought about establishing a rhythm of Sabbath. Andy Crouch talks about how technology has filled every corner of our lives and because of technology, "we do less and less of the two things human beings were made to do – work and rest."[45] Because of this, it's very likely that "the most important way you might Sabbath is to turn off screens."[46] Gavin Ortlund talks about taking the Sabbath as the one day a week you spend away from social media, with your phone turned off, with your computer closed.[47]

If you believe you must have your phone on at all times or want to use your computer, social media or other electronic devices, consider the possibility of a "Techno Sabbath" and even if it's just for a portion of the day, think through how this could positively impact your Sabbath.[48] I would suggest that deleting the web browser or social media apps, or at least setting up Screen Time limits so you can't access them for very long or at all on your Sabbath is a healthy practice. Tony Reinke talks about our "hyper-connection" through social media and how it can cause us to "forget about big, glorious realities like the inbreaking new creation of God."[49] And isn't that the purpose of the Sabbath? To remember the big, glorious realities of God?
I strongly encourage some sort of time away from technology in life. Sabbath seems like an ideal place to integrate that rhythm into one day of each week.

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[45] Andy Crouch, *The Tech-Wise Family: Everyday Steps for Putting Technology in Its Proper Place* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2017), 83.
[46] Justin Whitmel Earley, *The Common Rule*, 157.
[47] Gavin Ortlund, "7 Ways to Work Hard at Rest," *The Gospel Coalition*, last modified March 3, 2018, accessed September 8, 2022, https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/7-ways-to-work-hard-at-rest/.
[48] Abram Kielsmeier-Jones, "Sabbath-Keeping for Pastors," *CT Pastors* (Christianity Today, October 2021), last modified October 2021, accessed September 8, 2022, https://www.christianitytoday.com/pastors/2016/august-web-exclusives/sabbath-keeping-for-pastors.html.
[49] Tony Reinke, *12 Ways Your Phone Is Changing You* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2017), 155.

Review

Let's now close our time together with a little review of each of our Sabbath Sessions…

REST

- Take 1 day off from work each week (24-hour continuous period)

- No Work = No work emails, no work conversations, no work preparation

- Rest = Sleep / Nap – The idea of a Sabbath Nap is part of Jewish tradition

- Spend time with family, with your wife, not doing chores, but just being together

- Trust God = Spend time with Him

REMEMBER

- Read the Bible (but NOT for Work!)

- Spend time in Mediation / Contemplative Prayer

- Spend time Journaling

- Pray the Sabbath Kiddush (Jewish prayer/blessing)

1) Remember What God Has Done

2) Remember Who You Are In Christ

RECREATION

- Spend Time Outdoors
- Exercise
- Cook / Eat Good Food
- Music
- Create
- Read
- Include Your Spouse/Family/Friends
- Have Sex With Your Spouse

RHYTHM

- Establish a Sabbath Habit

- Implement Rituals

- Decide on Technology

Questions for Discussion

1) Describe your Sabbath. What will it look like starting next week?

2) What will be the biggest threats to your weekly Sabbath?

3) How can this group help you protect and practice your Sabbath?

4) What are you going home to that we can pray for?

Close with Psalm 46 as a Prayer

Go around the circle and invite each participant to pray a line. Close in prayer.

1) Be still, and know that I am God.

2) Be still, and know that I am.

3) Be still, and know that I.

4) Be still, and know that.

5) Be still, and know.

6) Be still, and.

7) Be still.

8) Be.

APPENDIX 5

POST PASTORAL MOUNTAIN COHORT INTERVIEW

Cohort/Sabbath Questions

1) Do you believe that the pastoral mountain cohort, learning about Sabbath, was beneficial for you? If yes, how so? If not, how could it have been more beneficial?

2) Were you able to practice a weekly Sabbath for the past 10 weeks? If not, what were some of the obstacles or factors that caused you to not Sabbath?

True/False Questions

3) True or False: Someone has taught me what a Sabbath is and what it looks like.

4) True or False: I believe a weekly Sabbath is important in my life and ministry.

5) True or False: I will seek to make a weekly Sabbath an aspect of my personal life.

Level of Satisfaction while Practicing Sabbath

1) In the past ten weeks, do you feel more satisfied, less satisfied, or about the same in regard to your current church/ministry context?

2) In the past ten weeks, do you feel more satisfied, less satisfied, or about the same in regard to your personal time with God in prayer?

3) In the past ten weeks, do you feel more satisfied, less satisfied, or about the same in regard to your personal time with God in the Bible?

4) In the past ten weeks, do you feel more satisfied, less satisfied, or about the same in regard to your current relationship with God?

5) In the past ten weeks, do you feel more satisfied, less satisfied, or about the same in regard to your relationships with your friends?

6) In the past ten weeks, do you feel more satisfied, less satisfied, or about the same in regard to your relationships with church members?

7) In the past ten weeks, do you feel more satisfied, less satisfied, or about the same in regard to your engagement with and attentiveness to your family?

8) In the past ten weeks, do you feel more satisfied, less satisfied, or about the same in regard to your relationship with your spouse (if single; significant other/best friend)

Insights and Takeaways

Are there any other insights or things that you wrote down in your Sabbath journal that you'd like to share with me?

APPENDIX 6

POST PASTORAL MOUNTAIN COHORT INTERVIEW RESPONSES

True/False Questions

True or False: Someone has taught me what a Sabbath is and what it looks like.
All 7 Cohort Members responded TRUE.

True or False: I believe a weekly Sabbath is important in my life and ministry.
All 7 Cohort Members responded TRUE.

True or False: I will seek to make a weekly Sabbath an aspect of my personal life.
All 7 Cohort Members responded TRUE.

Level of Satisfaction while Practicing Sabbath

More Satisfied *Less Satisfied* *About the Same*

1) Current church/ministry context
4 More Satisfied ***3 About the Same***

2) Personal time with God in prayer
5 More Satisfied ***2 About the Same***

3) Personal time with God in the Bible
5 More Satisfied ***2 About the Same***

4) Current relationship with God
7 More Satisfied

5) Relationships with friends
2 More Satisfied ***1 Less Satisfied*** ***4 About the Same***

6) Relationships with church members
4 More Satisfied ***3 About the Same***

7) Engagement with and attentiveness to family
7 More Satisfied

8) Relationship with your spouse (if single; significant other/best friend)
6 More Satisfied ***1 About the Same***

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